Disc Meets Globe

Shakespearean Reflexions in Terry Pratchett’s Wyrd Sisters

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Sarah GRYNKIEWICZ

am Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Begutachter: Ao.Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr.phil. Martin Löschnigg

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Dedication

For my grandmother (*1918 - †2013).

“Them as can do has to do for them as can’t. And someone has to speak up for them as has no voices.”

— Terry Pratchett, The Wee Free Men

This is a topsy-turvy THANK YOU to all the people who helped me write and FINISH this thesis!

Dear Prof. Löschnigg, thank you sooo much for your patience, concerns, and good advice!

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Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 5
Chapter 1: Shakespeare, Theory and Turtles ......................................................................................... 7
  1.1 Terry Pratchett’s Discworld ......................................................................................................... 7
  1.2 The Instruments of Analysis ...................................................................................................... 9
    1.2.1 Transtextuality ................................................................................................................. 10
    1.2.2 Parody .......................................................................................................................... 12
  1.3 The Poet and the Turtle ............................................................................................................. 13
    1.3.1 Shakespeare in 3D ........................................................................................................... 13
    1.3.2 Awareness ....................................................................................................................... 13
    1.3.3 Ignorance vs. Initiation .................................................................................................... 14
Chapter 2: Witches Wyrd and Weird .................................................................................................. 15
  2.1 Who Are The Wyrd/Weird Sisters? ............................................................................................. 16
    2.1.1 The Weird Sisters as Goddesses of Fate ......................................................................... 16
    2.1.2 Personifications of Macbeth’s Inner Guilt ...................................................................... 17
    2.1.3 Temptations .................................................................................................................... 17
  2.2. Witches in General .................................................................................................................. 18
    2.2.1 Influences ....................................................................................................................... 18
  2.3 The Wyrd and Weird Sisters as Individuals ............................................................................. 21
    2.3.1 The Witches of Lancre ................................................................................................... 21
    2.3.2 The Weird Sisters of Macbeth – Individuals? ............................................................... 27
    2.3.3 Round versus Flat Characters ....................................................................................... 28
  2.4. Acting as a group ..................................................................................................................... 29
    2.4.1 Hierarchy ........................................................................................................................ 29
    2.4.2 Sabbats and Covens ......................................................................................................... 30
    2.4.3 Witches and ‘Normal’ People ......................................................................................... 32
    2.4.4 Recognizing a Witch ....................................................................................................... 34
    2.4.5 Language ........................................................................................................................ 35
    2.4.6 ‘Fairy’ Godmothers ......................................................................................................... 36
    2.4.7 Being ‘Psychically Inclined’ ............................................................................................ 37
Summary ............................................................................................................................................... 42
Chapter 3: A Tale of Three Kings ....................................................................................................... 44
  3.1 The Role of the Kings .................................................................................................................. 44
  3.2 The Living Kings ........................................................................................................................ 45
    3.2.1 Appearance, Personality and Reign ................................................................................. 45
    3.2.2 “Real” vs. “Symbolic” Kings .......................................................................................... 48
  3.3 Death .......................................................................................................................................... 49
    3.3.1 Murder ............................................................................................................................ 49
    3.3.2 Reactions ........................................................................................................................ 50
    3.3.4 Cover-Ups ...................................................................................................................... 51
    3.3.5 Consequences ................................................................................................................ 52
    3.3.6 Order Restored .............................................................................................................. 56
Summary ............................................................................................................................................... 57
Chapter 4: Villain, villain .................................................................................................................. 58
  4.1 Duke Felmet ................................................................................................................................ 58
  4.2. Lady Felmet ............................................................................................................................... 65
Summary ............................................................................................................................................... 69
Introduction

The question that stands at the beginning of this thesis is about how one text from a specific genre, drama in this case, has been taken up, transformed and imbedded into a new text from a very different genre, i.e., a fantasy literature novel. What happens to the storyline, the characters, and the message? How is it done, what instruments are used, and what is the result?

These questions, and an attempt at answering them, are the topic of this thesis. The text that is analysed here is Terry Pratchett’s novel Wyrd Sisters\(^2\), a novel from his “Discworld” series; the book is a parody of William Shakespeare’s tragedy Macbeth\(^3\), with additional elements from Hamlet. The overall focus of the paper is on Macbeth; influences from Hamlet\(^4\) will be considered as need be. The aim of the analysis is to, by means of comparison, give the reader an insight into what Pratchett does with the Shakespearean models, how he changes elements, combines them in new ways, and plays with them until they develop into something new yet nonetheless familiar. To achieve this, I have concentrated on some of the major characters from both Wyrd Sisters and Macbeth who, to a certain extent, also show references to Hamlet. These characters are the three kings from the respective texts, the witches of Wyrd Sisters and Macbeth, and the figures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as well as their Discworld counterparts, Duke and Duchess Felmet. The criteria for selection are the great extent of parody and intertextuality in the figures, as well as their importance for the individual works.

A separate chapter deals with the topic of theatre, as it is a central theme of Wyrd Sisters in several ways. Firstly, it is based on plays; secondly, it is a parody of them; and thirdly, it is a discussion of theatre and the power of words. Throughout the novel, Pratchett lets his characters voice thoughts on, and theories of, the nature of ‘theatre’, which are combined with historical details about players and performances in Shakespearean times. Within this context, Pratchett includes serious discussion on how the use or abuse of words and texts can lead to different outcomes, such as defamation, slandering or the rise and fall of a person or system.

The instruments of analysis are the theories of ‘parody’, as they are formulated by Gerard Genette\(^5\) and Simon Dentith\(^6\), and ‘intertextuality’\(^7\), both of which will be discussed in the first chapter. To provide a better understanding of some of the historical themes related to *Wyrd Sisters*, details on the historic contexts will be given. The main source for these details is Terry Pratchett’s *The Folklore of Discworld* (2008)\(^8\), a discussion of literary, folkloristic and historic backgrounds of his Discworld novels; this work was written with anthropologist Jacqueline Simpson, and constitutes the only official work on Pratchett’s Discworld series. Due to Pratchett being a contemporary author whose work has not yet triggered much academic attention, secondary literature about his writings is scarce; all thoughts, ideas and conclusions in this thesis are thus mine unless otherwise noted.

Since *Wyrd Sisters*, or *Macbest* as it is titled in German, appears to be unknown to many Austrian readers, a summary is provided at the end of this thesis, in the Appendix. It is organized in numbered paragraphs, which seemed necessary as there are no formal chapters in the novel itself. Also, these numbered paragraphs are meant as a means of keeping the body of this thesis from becoming cluttered with too dense or detailed information on the novel by summarizing the same for the sake of readers’ comprehension. Thus, references to the Appendix are frequently made throughout the chapters, giving the page and paragraph number in the Appendix to enable easy rereading. Going through the Appendix of course is optional, though advised, as it will help readers unfamiliar with the novel to better understand the thesis. A precondition, however, is knowledge of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, which should be familiar to both students and friends of English literature.

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Chapter 1: Shakespeare, Theory and Turtles

1.1 Terry Pratchett’s Discworld

The story of the Discworld, at least for readers, began when Terry Pratchett published the first novel of the fantasy series titled *The Colour of Magic* in 1983. Now, thirty years later, the fortieth novel in the line, *Raising Steam*, is being presented to the public.

The Discworld is a fictitious parallel universe, deriving its name from its shape – a disc. This disc rests on the shoulders of four gigantic elephants, Berilia, Tubul, Great T’Phon and Jarakeen, who themselves stand on the back of the star turtle Great A’Tuin, who carries the Discworld through the universe. The humanoid inhabitants of this world can be divided into four main categories: humans, dwarves, trolls and the colourful group of the various species of the undead. The historical and folkloristic roots of the Disc can be found in the long-time belief of (Western) people that the Earth was flat. References to world-bearing animals can be found in many different cultures. In their book *The Folklore of Discworld*, Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson mention the tale of a white Englishman who had heard about the Indian myth of a world-bearing turtle, and asked an Indian man what the turtle itself was standing on, to which the latter allegedly answered: “It's turtles all the way down.”

Some Native Americans also tell a creation story of how the Earth was formed on the back of a turtle, the reason being that, at the time, there was only water around and the turtle was the only creature capable of floating on the water. So, by putting some mud on its shell that had been brought up from the bottom of the sea by a water bird, the creator formed the world on its back. That is why, in the language of, among others, the Cheyenne, America is called “Turtle Island”.

The Discworld, or Disc for short, is a parody of the real world, which it comments on, mocks, satirizes and criticizes. There is no single, over-arching storyline spanning the entire series; instead, Pratchett created numerous individual figures, settings and events, some of which are

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recounted in a single book, while others have been developed into numerous sequels over the years. The most prominent of these series-within-the-series are the “Watch/Sam Vimes”-series, the “Witches of Lancre” novels, “Death”, the “Wizards of the Unseen University”, the “Science of Discworld”\textsuperscript{11}, and, for a few years now, a series of books revolving around the young witch Tiffany Aching.

The temporal setting of the Disc is spatially bound; depending on location, the temporal settings (including its effects on culture, technology, and mores) are analogous to widely differing historical eras; for example, the fictitious country Ephebe resembles antique Greece, whereas the gigantic twin city Ankh-Morpork experiences changes reminiscent of the Industrial Revolution. Nonetheless, a character can move freely from one to the other in the same story. This allows Pratchett to mine a vast field of influences and source material, spanning from classical antiquity, through the middle ages, up to the eighteenth, and early nineteenth, centuries.

The Discworld novels are a mixture of various influences; the most prominent stem from the fields of literary texts, mostly written by Shakespeare in the case of \textit{Wyrd Sisters}, popular culture, folklore, and fairy tales. The last source is the reason why all Discworld novels end fairly well, just as modern fairy tales generally present the reader with a happy ending. The good wins, the evil is banished, and all live more or less happily ever after.

A major characteristic of Terry Pratchett’s fantasy world is magic. Magic is real on the Disc, an element like fire and earth. Raw magic can be found in nature, especially in the Ramtop Mountains, the Discworld’s main mountain range, and the setting of \textit{Wyrd Sisters}. As a rule, in the Discworld novels, “everything there is also exists as a thing”\textsuperscript{12}, the most prominent example thereof being the figure of Death. The end of life has often been depicted in literature, art, etc.; on the Discworld, \textit{he} is a ‘living’ skeleton shrouded in a black cloak, bearing a scythe and speaking always in capital letters. Part of his character is a constant confusion about and fascination with the ways of human beings, which allows Pratchett to use him as a platform for philosophical theories about humanity.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{The Science of Discworld} is a mini-series written with Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen that imbeds scientific research and philosophy into a Discworld story.

The life force of the Discworld is the power of story for which Pratchett uses the term “narrative imperative” or “narrativium”. According to Pratchett, the more often a story is repeated, the more powerful it becomes. Once a story is told anew, “narrative causality” sets in, meaning that the story takes shape, integrating into itself all versions of the story that have ever been told. The most powerful stories are able to reproduce themselves and drift off to other worlds as so-called “particles of inspiration”. In his novels, these “particles of inspiration” are used by Pratchett to explain some of the most striking parallels between real events and happenings in his fantasy world. For example, in *Wyrd Sisters*, a play is written that paraphrases Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the fictitious reason being that the play *Macbeth* is such a powerful story that it turned into “particles of inspiration” that drifted into the head of a Discworld playwright.

“Narrativium”, “narrative causality” and the “particles of inspiration” are inseparably linked to intertextuality, i.e., they are a means of establishing the same, of shaping the plot, for instance, of a Pratchett novel according to a Shakespearean play.

### 1.2 The Instruments of Analysis

The novel *Wyrd Sisters* begins with a paraphrasing of Act I, scene 1 of Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*. What Pratchett is doing on these first few pages is basically the same as what Shakespeare does in the opening scene of *Macbeth* – they both set the tone for their ensuing plots. However, while Shakespeare keeps the mysterious, sinister atmosphere of the first scene alive throughout his entire play, Pratchett uses it for a different purpose; first he establishes an atmosphere reminiscent of Shakespeare’s, enhancing the effect even more by using a direct quotation. Then, within a single sentence, he shatters the whole dramatic illusion together with the earlier established atmosphere:

> The night was as black as the inside of a cat. It was the kind of night, you could believe, on which gods moved men as though they were pawns on the chessboard of fate. In the middle of this elemental storm a fire gleamed among the dripping furze bushes like the madness in a weasel's eye. It illuminated three hunched figures. As the cauldron bubbled an eldritch voice shrieked: 'When shall we three meet again?' There was a pause.  
> (*Wyrd Sisters*: 5).

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13 *Narrativium*, on the Discworld, is also a substance, an element like helium or plutonium. In this form, it is referred to as the “umpty-umph” element. (Pratchett, Stewart and Cohen 2003/2002: 24).

14 Cf. Chapter 6: *Theatre*. 

9
Then, within a single sentence, he shatters the whole dramatic illusion together with the earlier established atmosphere: “Finally another voice said, in far more ordinary tones: ‘Well, I can do next Tuesday.’” (ibid.).

He makes clear from the very beginning what his novel is supposed to be: a **parody**. It is not merely making fun of its literary model, though. In *Wyrd Sisters*, the reader finds historical and folkloristic details, criticism of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, as well as of the times they were written in, together with comments on more recent popular culture and developments. Examples of **intertextuality** do not only refer to Shakespeare, but to numerous older and younger texts from different genres, which will not be discussed here, as the thesis focuses on the relationship of Pratchett and Shakespeare.

### 1.2.1 Transtextuality

The term transtextuality describes the relationship between literary texts and was coined by Gérard Genette in his book *Palimpseste. Literature in the Second Degree* (1997a), claiming that every text includes at least one kind of transtextuality. It is an umbrella term, including five subcategories, three of which are of relevance here: hypertextuality, intertextuality, and metatextuality.

#### Hypertextuality

Hypertextuality is one of the types of transtextuality that is of interest for this thesis. It concerns the relations between a newer text B (the so-called **hypertext**) and an older text A (the **hypotext**), i.e., the intertextual connections between a model text and a secondary text. The hypertext B processes the hypotext A by using transformation techniques or imitation. Means of transformation are, for example, simple or direct references to the hypotext, or

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17 The categories that will not be discussed in this thesis are paratextuality and architextuality.

making use of plot structures in the hypertext. Imitation, on the other hand, means complex or indirect references and processing of the hypotext. Text B uses certain features of text A, i.e., characteristics of the hypertext B are based on the model of the hypotext. In the case of Wyrd Sisters, Shakespeare's tragedies Macbeth and Hamlet are the hypotexts for Pratchett's novel.

**Intertextuality**

Generally speaking, intertextuality in literature may be defined as the relationship of one text to an earlier written work. Intertextual elements may be established or made visible within a text by using quotations, references and imitations of pre-existing formulations, clichés, etc. Being a parody of Macbeth and Hamlet, Wyrd Sisters is an intertextual novel that imitates the plays' plots, styles of speech, characters and locations.

**Metatextuality**

Metatextuality describes the relationship between a model text that is being alluded to and a secondary text that deals with the model text on a meta-level, thereby critically analysing the model text either with regard to content or form. The model text is usually not explicitly named. In Wyrd Sisters, Pratchett refers to Shakespearean plays by means of quoting, paraphrasing, criticising and imitating, but he never explicitly names Shakespeare or his works. Furthermore, the Discworld novels are *meta-fictional*. Metafiction includes self-reflexive comments that refer to the discourse and narration rather than the story level, e.g., a fictional text reflecting on its own fictionality. Pratchett’s novels comment on Shakespeare's style of dramatic language by means of imitation, but with the result of the characters in Wyrd Sisters not being able to understand and/or use it correctly, which causes utter failure on their side in mimicking and reinterpreting Shakespeare's words.

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1.2.2 Parody

For this thesis, the definitions of ‘parody’ given by Simon Dentith and Gérard Genette will be used, since they provide the most appropriate approach in the context of Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels. Generally speaking, parody is a playful imitation and transformation of one author's (A) work by another writer (B). This imitation may be mocking, ridiculing, criticising, ironical or satirical. It is also an analysis of author A's style by author B, which is necessary for author B to imitate and transform A’s style and text successfully. There is, furthermore, a 'polemical' aspect of parody: its way of attacking either the earlier text or a new situation in a more or less aggressive style; the level of aggressiveness may vary.

Terry Pratchett, in Wyrd Sisters, imitates Shakespeare's Macbeth and Hamlet in many respects; the plays are transformed, altered, and alternately mocked and criticised. Pratchett plays with Shakespeare's figures by rearranging their roles and characteristics, giving them new attributes and lives. Instances of dramatic irony (i.e., a discrepancy between reader/audience awareness and character awareness) occur when Pratchett's figures cling too much to their Shakespearean models, as is further explained on the basis of the example of Duke Felmet in Chapter 5: Villain, villain.

Wyrd Sisters can be categorized as a 'specific' parody – that is, a parody that alludes to a specific earlier text (Hamlet, Macbeth) and also turns on dramatic conventions. Their polemical, or even aggressive, aspect can be found in Pratchett's repeated criticism of Shakespearean and Elizabethan stereotypes. Wyrd Sisters may also be termed a travesty of Shakespeare's plays. According to Simon Dentith (2000: 194, 195), a travesty is either a playful, sometimes satirical, transformation of an earlier text, or a comic-satirical transformation of a genre or specific style of a writer, and thus difficult to tell apart from parody. This term applies to Terry Pratchett's novel as it transforms the dramatic texts in a rather playful, but at the same time satirical and critical way.

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1.3 The Poet and the Turtle

1.3.1 Shakespeare in 3D

Many flat characters in Shakespeare’s plays, for instance the witches of *Macbeth*\(^{26}\), are given depth by Terry Pratchett. He does so by lowering the degree of stereotypes that Shakespeare worked into the figures, and then adding new personalities and characteristics, thus giving them a new role in the story of *Wyrd Sisters*. This process is comparable to a geometric figure that at first consists of only a few one-dimensional lines on a sheet of paper. By simply adding some vertical lines, this drawing can be developed into a three-dimensional body.

If the initial one-dimensional drawing represents *Macbeth*, then the vertical lines stand for intertextuality, parody, history and all other instruments employed by Pratchett to create his novel *Wyrd Sisters*. If the drawing, i.e., *Macbeth*, is now combined with the vertical lines, i.e., intertextuality, etc., the result is *Wyrd Sisters* in the form of a three-dimensional figure, based on the outlines of *Macbeth*, as is shown in Table 1: *Equation of Shakespeare and Pratchett* at the end of the chapter. Of course, this is a very simplified way of explaining the process of transformation from a Shakespearean play to a fantasy novel, but it can be applied to several elements, such as the plots of Shakespeare’s plays and each individual character.

1.3.2 Awareness

An interesting question is that of ‘awareness’: to what degree are Pratchett’s characters ‘aware’ of their Shakespearean models, and how is this ‘awareness’ accomplished?

In *Wyrd Sisters*, many so-called ‘traditions’ are paraphrases of characters’ behaviour in Shakespeare’s plays. When, for instance, Pratchett’s witches decide to work a spell in the ‘traditional’ way, they quote Shakespeare’s witches. Such ‘traditional’ Shakespearean behaviour usually does not work properly in *Wyrd Sisters*; whereas scenes such as the ‘cauldron scene’ in *Macbeth* are dark, mysterious and frightening, they are parodied and mocked in *Wyrd Sisters* as the characters fail to interpret and re-enact Shakespeare’s words properly. ‘Traditions’ derived from fairy tales, however, are referred to and enacted in a more

\(^{26}\) See Chapter 2: *Witches Wyrd and Weird.*
serious tone; while scenes of Shakespearean ‘traditions’ are often highly amusing for the reader, scenes of fairy tale ‘traditions’ are of major importance for the plot of *Wyrd Sisters*\textsuperscript{27}.

Apart from these ‘traditions’, ‘particles of inspiration’ mentioned earlier are a means of establishing ‘awareness’. According to Pratchett, highly influential ideas and stories have the ability to float from one world to another where they may inspire an open mind, or influence the behaviour of the world’s inhabitants. An example of the workings of these ‘particles’ is discussed in Chapter 6: *Theatre*.

### 1.3.3 Ignorance vs. Initiation

To understand and enjoy *Wyrd Sisters*, readers do not necessarily have to be familiar with Shakespeare’s tragedies, i.e., they can be ignorant of the hypotexts *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. The transformation of Shakespeare’s tragedies and their results in *Wyrd Sisters*, however, are only perceptible for initiated readers, that is, readers who know Shakespeare’s plays and are thus able to retrace Pratchett’s steps back to their initial source. The same holds true for other elements of *Wyrd Sisters*, such as historical events, folklore, popular culture and fairy tales. Again, the ignorant reader, unfamiliar with these aspects would nevertheless be able to enjoy the novel, albeit while unknowingly missing several facets; for the initiated reader, however, Pratchett’s work offers a wide range of interesting facets and transformations unknown to the ignorant reader.

\[
\text{Table 1: Equation of Shakespeare and Pratchett}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Macbeth} & \quad + \quad \text{Intertextuality, Parody, History, etc.} \quad \sim \\
\text{Wyrd Sisters} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{Macbeth} + Intertextuality, Parody, History, etc. = (more or less) *Wyrd Sisters*

\textsuperscript{27} See for instance the time travelling spell in *Wyrd Sisters*. See also: Appendix p. 113, paragraph 10.11, and Chapter 2: *Witches Wyrd and Weird*. 14
Chapter 2: Witches Wyrd and Weird

In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare named his three witches the ‘weird sisters’. Terry Pratchett, by titling his witches the ‘wyrd sisters’, plays with this name by tracing its etymological roots back to the Anglo-Saxon language. His reasons for doing so are explained in more detail in *The Folklore of Discworld*. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, *wyrd* meant ‘Fate’ or ‘Destiny’ in Old English (OE). Considering that the witches of both *Macbeth* and *Wyrd Sisters* influence the destinies of kings and kingdoms, the name appears appropriate. From this point, these names will be used to differentiate between the two groups of witches.

The reader immediately encounters the three witches in the opening pages of Terry Pratchett’s *Wyrd Sisters*. The scene paraphrases the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*: it is a dark and stormy night, the darkness being punctuated by the light of a fire, somewhere on an otherwise deserted heath. An eerie voice screeches the portentous words “‘When shall we three meet again?’”

Terry Pratchett’s *Wyrd Sisters* is a highly intertextual work of literature; the witches are among the most important agents of intertextuality. Their depiction recalls *Hamlet* and, to a far greater extent, *Macbeth*. Scenes involving the witches parallel and paraphrase these two plays, often quoting from and re-enacting them. They are significant for the element of parody in the novel, and also fulfil mocking and criticising functions. The witches are predominantly shown to be the exact opposite of Shakespeare’s witches in both actions and appearance; thus, they can be said to be a “topsy turvy” depiction held up to them.

Apart from intertextuality, the witches are of great importance for the overall plot structure of *Wyrd Sisters*. They stand at the plot’s centre: the story revolves around them and their actions. The novel itself is not a homogeneous whole, but is diverted into several individual story

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30 *Wyrd Sisters*: 5.
lines. The plot line of the witches is like a red thread throughout the novel, with which all other lines interact until they merge at the end of the novel.

Before beginning the detailed analysis of Shakespeare’s and Pratchett’s witches, I would like to point out a problem concerning the figure of Hecate in *Macbeth*. Since her song in *Macbeth* III.5 and parts of the cauldron scene in IV.1 are allegedly copied from another play, Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch*, written between 1609 and 1616, they will not be included in this thesis.31

### 2.1 Who Are The Wyrd/Weird Sisters?

During the last decades, numerous treatises, articles, and other learned works have been written about the nature of the weird sisters in Shakespeare’s tragedy *Macbeth*. The definitions range from goddesses of fate, to personifications of Macbeth’s inward guilt, to representations of temptation, without having produced a completely satisfying answer to the recent day. In this thesis, these definitions will be only briefly discussed as they are only of marginal importance to the analysis.

#### 2.1.1 The Weird Sisters as Goddesses of Fate

The text of *Macbeth* states very explicitly that the three sisters are witches, instruments of darkness and evil, and not goddesses, unlike Hecate, their mistress. They do influence the destiny of Macbeth through their prophecies and illusions, but nothing in the drama, except perhaps their name, indicates that they are anything but, admittedly, strange women with magical powers.

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2.1.2 Personifications of Macbeth’s Inner Guilt

This attempt of defining the sisters has been put forward by Cumberland Clark in *A Study of Macbeth* (1976). It is a far-fetched theory that is not underpinned by the facts of the play. Upon hearing the witches’ prophecies, Macbeth feels confirmed in his ambitions, but until the actual murder, there is no guilt in him. He might be conscience-stricken at first, as long as he struggles with the idea of killing Duncan, but this is put to an end by his wife’s interventions. Furthermore, if the witches represented his guilt and inner torment, why do they prophesy the receipt of the title of Thane of Cawdor? Macbeth may already have harboured hopes for the crown, but he is completely surprised by this prediction. He never thought of fearing a man not born by a woman or Birnam Wood either. Finally, the prophecy Banquo receives from the witches does not fit Clark’s theory – why would he be given a foretelling of his future if the witches were mere representations of Macbeth’s guilt? The theory is thus led *ad absurdum.*

2.1.3 Temptations

A.C. Bradley\(^{32}\) introduced the idea that the weird sisters might really be representations of temptation. Their prophecies certainly prove an irresistible temptation, not only to Macbeth himself, but also to his wife, Lady Macbeth. Even Banquo, who at first puts the thought of his descendants becoming kings aside, cannot help secretly hoping for the foretelling to come true. Incidentally, this prophecy is also the reason for his murder on the command of Macbeth, who is driven by jealousy, in a futile attempt to change the course of fate.

The witches have chosen a promising point of time for approaching Macbeth. After a recently won victory, his ambitions are already high and easily kindled. Also, they put into a verbal prophecy the secretly harboured hopes which help overcome his first doubts. What their temptation does is fascinate, persuade and delude him, leading him to a path of damnation. It does not, however, take away his free will. As Macbeth admits himself, the prophecies never told him what to do, and he alone is to be held responsible for his actions.

Whatever else Shakespeare’s weird sisters may or may not be, it is certain that they are agents of evil, impersonating the stereotypes, clichés and fears of Shakespeare’s contemporaries that

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play on people’s irrational superstitions instead of logic. They are of great importance for the plot of *Macbeth*, although they are not the main characters. They are one, or probably the major, trigger for the murder of Duncan, and the resulting consequences are closely linked to their meddling with Macbeth, whom they ‘help’ along on his bloody path. Although they are decisive for setting the dark and sinister atmosphere of the play, they are not always prominent on stage. Apart from evil, they are also agents of chaos, breaking the social and natural order in *Macbeth’s* Scotland.

### 2.2. Witches in General

#### 2.2.1 Influences

The witches in Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld* novels are a blend of various influences. The main four elements stem from fairy tales, Shakespeare’s plays, most notably *Macbeth*, accounts of historical wise women, and modern folklore and popular culture. This mixture of influences adds to the witches’ multifaceted characters, preventing them from being flat and stereotypical. Speaking for the balance he achieved is the fact that none of these influences dominates – his witches are neither merely the bad hags from fairy tales nor the evil troublemakers from Shakespeare’s plays. They have most in common with wise women, although their magical powers are real and they face duties no real wise woman would ever have had to face, such as protecting their home country from human and supernatural dangers.

While the so-called ‘traditions’ of Pratchett’s wyrd sisters have their roots in fairy tales and Shakespeare’s work, their style of clothing, for instance, stems from modern popular culture. As a result, it is almost impossible for a reader to put them into merely one drawer.

Examples of the influence of fairy tales can be found, among others, in the traditional housing of Pratchett’s Discworld witches: “Most witches preferred to live in isolated cottages with the traditional curly chimneys and weed-grown thatch. Granny Weatherwax approved of this; it was no good being a witch unless you let people know.” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 64). Granny Weatherwax’s own cottage is situated somewhere in the Lancre forest and its herb garden alone serves to make any visitor nervous. This is intentional, as the old witch has a very well developed sense of drama and knows how to create an eerie atmosphere. Other examples of obvious fairy tale elements in Pratchett’s novel include the “apple-seller-trick,” which refers
to the story of Snow White and is hardly successful in Wyrd Sisters. The three witches’ posing as fairy godmothers, and the habit of a wicked witch, ‘Black’ Aliss Demourage, to live in a gingerbread house and have girls kiss frogs\textsuperscript{33} can be listed as well. Granny Weatherwax, although claiming that she could not be moved to deal with such ‘traditions’, is nevertheless the one among the three witches to keep to them most rigorously. The influence of historical wise women most clearly visible in the witches’ professions. They are midwives, healers, gravediggers and judges, passing their knowledge from one generation to the next.

The most prominent link to history is provided in Pratchett’s criticism of learned writings on the subject of witches and witchcraft. History shows that “witches” and books have a rather difficult relationship. James I of England himself wrote a learned book about witches, demons and other supernatural powers, titled Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue (1597)\textsuperscript{34}. Such treatises and the king’s own witchcraft-related paranoia had severe consequences for many people at the time. An unknown number of victims, all being accused of, and persecuted for, conducting witchcraft and conspiring with the devil, died in extremely painful ways during the witchcraft hysteria in England and especially Scotland over the period of his reign. Plays such as Shakespeare's Macbeth with its emphasis on the supernatural and evil doings of witches perhaps only helped to worsen the situation even more.

In his Discworld novel Wyrd Sisters, Terry Pratchett plays with these treatises and ‘educated’ writings and denounces them as being utter nonsense. His Discworld equivalent of Macbeth, Duke Leonal Felmet, after having read about witches in some learned books, which very likely are a reference to James I’s writings, becomes exceedingly frightened about witches, fancying them to be conspiring against him and planning to overthrow and even kill him\textsuperscript{35}. When he confronts the sergeant of his guard, who reports of his unsuccessful attempt of arresting a witch for interrogation purposes, with his readings, the man's reaction is far from what he expected, showing clearly how far away from the truth the clichés and stereotypes Felmet has been reading about are.

\textsuperscript{33} Black Aliss also performed a time moving spell on a castle that moved the building with all inhabitants a hundred years into the future, where the princess was supposed to be kissed awake by a prince. This charm, reminding of the story of Sleeping Beauty, serves as inspiration for Granny Weatherwax’s own spell that moved the kingdom of Lancre fifteen years into the future (see Appendix p. 113, paragraph 10.11). Black Aliss found an untimely end when two children shoved her into her own stove.


\textsuperscript{35} See section 2.4.3 Witches and ‘normal’ people.
'I expect she said some magic words, did she? I've heard about witches,' said the duke, who had spent the night before reading, until his bandaged hands shook too much, some of the more excitable works on the subject. [3] 'I imagine she offered you visions of unearthly delight? Did she show you— the duke shuddered—'dark fascinations and forbidden raptures, the like of which mortal men should not even think of, and demonic secrets that took you to the depths of man's desire?'

[3] Written by wizards, who are celibate and get some pretty funny ideas around four o'clock in the morning.

[...]'Admit it—she offered you hedonistic and licentious pleasures known only to those who dabble in the carnal arts, didn't she?'

The sergeant stood to attention and stared straight ahead.

'No, sir,' he said, in the manner of one speaking the truth come what may. 'She offered me a bun.'

'A bun?'

'Yes, sir. It had currants in it.'

(Wyrd Sisters: 57, 58)

In passages such as the quote above, Pratchett makes fun of the imagined stereotypical behaviour of witches and the beliefs of James I and his contemporaries, and gives an example of how their ideas would have clashed with reality. It is also a general critique of naively believing what a few people, likely the victims of their own fantasy, write without scrutinizing these ideas.

The influence of modern popular culture can best be observed in the witches’ style of clothing, which mostly consists of a costume that can be often seen around Halloween, i.e., black dresses and pointed hats. Pratchett’s witches also use broomsticks for flying and at least one of them, Nanny Ogg, keeps a big grey cat with an exceptionally bad reputation. Different modern culture influences are notions about covens, occult jewellery and being in harmony with nature, as the young Magrat Garlick represents. These ideas stem most likely from Wiccan and Neo-Pagan movements.

One of the witches’ traditions says that they would have to stay at home during Hogswatchnight, Terry Pratchett’s equivalent of Christmas and New Year’s Eve in his Discworld novels. This idea probably stems from the popular culture and folklore of Shakespeare's time, when it was believed that the time of Christmas was so holy that spirits, elves and witches were bound to stay hidden and inactive. A reference to this belief can be found in Hamlet I.1. 139-14536. Other influences from Hamlet are rather sparse, apart from a

36 Hamlet I.1.139-145: “MARCELLUS Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes/ Wherein our saviour's birth is celebrated/The bird of dawning singeth all night long/And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad./The
charm that has to be finished before the first cockcrow to be effective, whereas there seems to be no end to ideas taken from Macbeth. Again, the wyrd sisters are aware of these influences in the form of traditions, as is the case with fairy tales. There is a major difference between traditions taken from fairy tales and those stemming from Macbeth, however. The former are always performed or spoken of in a rather serious tone, whereas the witches’ attempts to adhere to the latter either end in a comical situation, or are meant to criticise the witches in Macbeth. Such scenes contribute greatly to the quality of parody of Wyrd Sisters.

Shakespeare’s weird sisters, like Pratchett’s witches, are a blend, although of folklore, stereotypes and people’s fears during the poet’s time. Everything about them is meant to tell the audience that they are seeing bad witches performing evil tasks. What would have been scary and unsettling during Shakespeare’s days appears rather flat and to some extent comic nowadays, however. His witches seem to be one-dimensional caricatures, especially when compared to Pratchett’s multifaceted witches.

2.3 The Wyrd and Weird Sisters as Individuals

2.3.1 The Witches of Lancre

Esmerelda “Granny” Weatherwax

Esmeralda Weatherwax, mostly referred to as “Granny” Weatherwax, had her first appearance in Terry Pratchett’s novel Equal Rites (1987) as one of its main characters. In the Discworld series, she is generally described as one of the most powerful witches on the Discworld. In Wyrd Sisters she takes over the role of the leader of a small coven, including, besides herself, her colleagues Gytha Ogg and Magrat Garlick. As the leader, she is not only the driving force of the coven but also for the whole plot of the novel, as numerous events depend on her decisions and actions.

She does not have a real model in either Hamlet or Macbeth. In her role as leader of the three witches, a relationship to Hecate, the master of the weird sisters in Macbeth, could be
assumed. Apart from their status, however, there are no remarkable parallels. Other examples of intertextuality include her two prophecies, as can be read in the paragraph 2.4.7 Being ‘psychically inclined’. Instead, far more of her character traits and her behaviour point to fairy tales, folklore, popular culture and historical wise women as their origins.

Terry Pratchett depicts this powerful witch as an old spinster, whose major characteristics seem to be her pride, an iron will, and her carefully stored and dammed anger. The figures around her tend to perceive her as somewhat arrogant and headstrong. Due to the technique of an omniscient narrator, the reader is given glimpses into her inner self, below the cool surface, though. As hard and confident her figure may appear on the outside, throughout the novel, readers are shown her doubts, worries and her weak points, such as a discontent with her physical appearance and difficulties at establishing interpersonal relationships. She knows a lot about the human nature and how to read other people like books, but she does lack significant social skills. In addition, it can be stated that she is a very intelligent woman with good leadership qualities, who is quick to find advantages in new situations.

All of Pratchett’s witches have their own fields of expertise. As for Granny Weatherwax, she is a master of, what she calls, ‘headology’, i.e., psychology with an edge. As has been stated before, she is an expert on human nature, but she is also able to send her mind out of her own body and have it enter the mind of any other living creature. Usually, she merely observes that other mind, at times slightly stirring her host, animals mostly, to go wherever she wants to go, a skill referred to as ‘borrowing’ in the Discworld novels. The most remarkable exception in Wyrd Sisters is her fight against Duchess Felmet, as can be read in the Appendix page 123-124, paragraph 13.3.

Among the three wyrd sisters she is the one who hungers most for the respect of her fellow people. In her opinion, if you lose the respect of others, you lose everything. The events of Wyrd Sisters confirm her views somewhat, as the witches in the last third of the book find themselves threatened by a smear campaign their opponent Felmet has launched against them and the consequences resulting from it. To ensure that she is treated with all due respect, she often draws on her sense of drama and employs stereotypes and people’s superstitions for her own good37.

37 It is surprising what shrieking doors, rocking chairs moving by themselves and coloured water in small glass phials can do for a witch’s reputation.
Sometimes, Granny appears to be somewhat set in her ways. Unlike her colleagues who, at times, take a more liberal stance when it comes to traditions and rules, Granny Weatherwax is a strict proponent of them. Thus it is not surprising that she shows the strongest fairy tale influences among the witches, as many of the Discworld novels’ witch traditions are derived from popular fairy tales\textsuperscript{38}. Other traditions stem from the behaviour of Shakespeare’s witches in \textit{Macbeth}. Paradoxically, Granny Weatherwax is at her best, and also most convincing to the reader, when she breaks those rules, acting on her own account instead of being led by stereotypes and clichés, as in Pratchett’s version of \textit{Macbeth’s} cauldron scene. The success of a charm the wyrd sisters try to produce by copying Shakespeare’s weird sisters is doubted not only by the reader but by the figures themselves. Granny’s encounter with the demon the witches invoke, as another example, only proves successful when she goes against the rule of asking only three questions and simply threatens to boil the demon if it would not be cooperative.

Tradition said that there could be only three questions. Granny tried to formulate one that could not be deliberately misunderstood. Then she decided that this was playing the wrong kind of game.

‘What the hell is going on?’ she said carefully. ‘And no mucking about trying to wriggle out of it, otherwise I’ll boil you.’ \textit{(Wyrd Sisters: 96)}.

As long as she keeps to these Shakespearean ‘traditions’ and rules of magic, she appears indecisive, paralyzed, and even at times comical. Once she decides to go against them, this figure reveals its full potential to the readers: she is a powerful, effective and convincing appearance.

Throughout \textit{Wyrd Sisters}, the reader encounters clashes between Granny and the younger Magrat Garlick that could be titled ‘generation clashes’. Most of the time they revolve around Granny’s love for traditions and old ways of doing things while Magrat is heavily influenced by Wiccan notions, trying to introduce new ideas into the coven, which Granny patronizingly discount as: “‘Modern,’ said Granny Weatherwax, with a sniff. ‘When I was a gel, we had a lump of wax and a couple of pins and had to be content. We had to make our own enchantment in them days.’” \textit{(Wyrd Sisters: 32)}. As uncomfortable as the older witch often seems to be when confronted with new ideas, for example with the theatre, she is nevertheless the one first to recognize their underlying workings.

\textsuperscript{38} See paragraph on \textit{Influences}. 
All three witches become entangled in the performance of a play in the last quarter of *Wyrd Sisters*. Other than Nanny and Magrat, however, this is not the only time that Granny becomes part of a play. She does so rather early in the novel, although unconsciously and incompletely. For more details see Appendix p. 102, paragraph 4.1.

The last that should be said about the figure of Granny Weatherwax is that Pratchett appears to have played with Puritan influences when he created her character. Not unlike the Puritans of Shakespeare’s time, she is against everything that her friend Gytha Ogg would consider ‘fun’, including dancing, drinking, making a show of oneself and the theatre. She is an advocate for the importance of traditions, reason and common sense, criticising especially naïve beliefs in third hand knowledge and rumours, and the stereotypical behaviour of Shakespeare’s witches.

**Gytha ‘Nanny’ Ogg**

Gytha Ogg has her first appearance in *Wyrd Sisters* (1988), where she takes over the role of a counterweight to Granny Weatherwax. She acts in many ways as a counterpart to the other witch, which is important for keeping the balance both in the coven as well as in the whole novel; she keeps the figure of Granny from overpowering the plot and helps her to achieve major goals. She is furthermore important for the novel as she contributes decisive impulses, such as claiming the witches to be Tomjon’s godmothers. It also falls to her to checkmate the duchess in their last shared scene. She furthermore adds to the readers’ understanding of Granny Weatherwax as she repeatedly explains her colleague’s behaviour and the rules she is following. Finally, she is a main instrument for parody, while Granny is rather one for criticism.

A relationship like that of Granny and Nanny can be found in many other literary works.\(^{39}\) While being friends, their characters are in many ways exact opposites, covering, for instance, their physical appearance,\(^ {40}\) family statuses, personal and interpersonal skills, and in

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\(^{39}\) For example: Asterix and Obelix, Mickey Mouse and Goofy, Stan Lawrel and Oliver Hardy, etc.

\(^{40}\) Granny is described, by the author, as having “handsome”, if slightly “equine features”, with “a rosy complexion” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 34). Pratchett pictures her friend as “as gummy as a baby and [she] had a face like a small dried raisin” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 43), framed by thick, white curls. Magrat finally, is described by Granny Weatherwax: “The best you could say for Magrat was that she was decently plain and well-scrubbed and as flat-
general their attitude towards traditions, rules and life. Usually, Nanny finds it wiser to go along with Granny’s decisions but equals her enough in status and experience to stand up to her if need be, keeping her from becoming too headstrong. Like Granny Weatherwax, she does not have a real counterpart in Macbeth, but the fact of her having given birth to fifteen children points to an influence from Hecuba, who is mentioned in Hamlet (II.2. 481-489), who supposedly bore at least seventeen children 41.

One of Pratchett’s motifs when creating the character of Nanny Ogg might have been “still waters run deep”. On the surface Granny is a buoyant connoisseur of the art of living, appearing comfy, friendly and a little soft. Also, she thinks of herself as being better educated than she really is, often mixing up and confusing terms and theories. Surprisingly often, however, her naïve assumptions are proven to be correct under the attendant circumstances. Underneath this unconcerned surface lies what some would term ‘peasants’ cunning’, an intelligence less arbitrary than that of the tactician Granny Weatherwax, but no less effective. In many things she is more down to earth than her friend. For example, while Granny, when working out a plan, believes that witches simply cannot fail, Nanny very well considers the possibility of failure and prepares to prevent it 42.

One of the most remarkable differences between Gytha Ogg and Esmerelda Weatherwax are the former’s interpersonal skills. Nanny is a walking encyclopaedia of the people of Lancre, their doings and their relationships among each other. Being regarded as very experienced in many matters of daily life, people often seek her advice 43. In the coven, her ability of communication makes her stand out as a mediator between Granny and Magrat. During these times, she shows a great insight into Granny’s psyche and character, as well as into the general ‘ways of life’ and the rules of witchcraft, which she explains to both Magrat and the reader. Her skills, furthermore, permit her to judge situations concerning humans more correctly than Granny, who often assumes that people would simply share her point of view on everything.

chest as an ironing board with a couple of peas on it, even if her head was too well stuffed with fancies.” (ibid.)


42 See Appendix p. 114, paragraph 10.18

43 In comparison, while the awakened kingdom of Lancre foremost seeks Granny’s attention, it is Nanny that the unsatisfied burghers of Lancre turn to for asking help against Felmet’s misrule.
Finally, her description as an authoritarian matriarch should be mentioned. While her tomcat Greebo is one of her few blind spots, she is a strict ruler of her giant family tribe whose members form a network all over Lancre, at all times standing to her attention. Her rule is described as follows:

[She] lived in a new, knick-knack crammed cottage in the middle of Lancre town itself and at the heart of her own private empire. Various daughters and daughters-in-law came in to cook and clean on a sort of rota. Every flat surface was stuffed with ornaments brought back by far-travelling members of the family. Sons and grandsons kept the logpile stocked, the roof shingled, the chimney swept; the drinks cupboard was always full, the pouch by her rocking chair stuffed with tobacco. Above the hearth was a huge pokerwork sign saying ‘Mother’. No tyrant in the whole history of the world had ever achieved a domination so complete. (Wyrd Sisters: 64).

**Magrat Garlick**

The youngest member of the wyrd sisters has her first appearance, like Nanny Ogg, in the novel *Wyrd Sisters* (1988) and represents the coven’s and witchcraft’s modern aspects, largely derived from Wiccan and Neo-Pagan movements. As has already been stated earlier, Magrat stands for the conflict between old and young, tradition and new ideas, yearning for the respect of the older witches, and for being accepted by them, but at the same time seeking a modernization of witchcraft. This leads to clashes with the somewhat rigid Granny Weatherwax, leaving Nanny with the role of a mediator. Her importance for the novel as a whole consists of her initiating the wyrd sisters’ coven in the first place, introducing her colleagues to the theatre and the strolling players, suggesting the presenting of Tomjon with three magical gifts, and having the redeeming solution for how to proceed with Duke Felmet’s anti-witch propaganda play. Furthermore, she brings in an individual, romantic storyline including the former court jester ‘Fool’ and later king of Lancre.

Unlike Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg, Magrat Garlick does have a real counterpart in one of Shakespeare’s plays, although not in *Macbeth*, but rather *Hamlet*. This model is the unfortunate Ophelia, although Magrat’s own story leads to a much happier end and could be said to be a more positive version of the young woman’s fate.

Her role in the novel *Wyrd Sisters* is probably the one that is the least defined. She has only just begun her professional career as an independent practitioner of magic and a village witch in the village of Mad Stoat, whose “good-natured” inhabitants are “getting used to ear
massages and flower-based homeopathic remedies for everything short of decapitation” (Wyrd Sisters: 89). She has not yet found a fixed place in society, which leads to people, including Granny, often not regarding her as a real witch. Being intelligent and comparatively well-educated, she often encounters instances of miscommunication with the rural inhabitants of Lancre. Her inner uncertainty results in her being torn between trying to adhere to traditions, while at the same time attempting to introduce ‘new’ ways of practicing witchcraft to the other witches. Since these attempts usually fail, she is often frustrated with the others, but nevertheless holds them in great awe. In the first half of the novel she is shown as being a great believer in colourful candles, occult amulets, magic ingredients, auras, etc. When it is shown to her during the invocation scene, that none of all these things are necessary for a successful conjuring, she is willing to let go of them and try the older witches’ approach. Compared to the other two witches, she often appears to be soft and weak, an impression that is increased by her being a notorious romantic. Nevertheless, she often surprises her colleagues, herself and the reader with her strength, skills and ideas.

Throughout the novel and the whole Discworld series, however, she is the one among all the witches who shows the greatest potential for further development. Subsequently, her life situation and character are the ones that change the most in the Wyrd Sister sequels.

2.3.2 The Weird Sisters of Macbeth – Individuals?

What strikes a reader of Macbeth first is that the witches have no names – they are differentiated only by numbers (first, second, and third witch), or are addressed collectively as the “weird sisters”, which adds to their anonymity and the play’s concentration on their role as a group. The only account of their physical appearance is given by Banquo in Macbeth I.3. 37-46. He does not describe them individually, but as if they were all looking alike or extremely similar, thus strengthening the impression of the witches’ uniformity. The only supernatural figure that has been given a name is Hecate.

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44 See Appendix p. 106, paragraph 7.12.
45 For example in Macbeth I.3. 30; II.1. 19; III.4. 132.
46 For a mere reader of Macbeth, it stays unknown whether she is any different from the other witches in terms of physical appearance or magical powers.
What the witches do individually seems of no great importance for the plot of *Macbeth*, their activities rather serve the acknowledgement of stereotypes and popular beliefs about witches. For example, whether the first witch killed a farmer’s swine in *Macbeth* I.3. 2, or whether the third witch did it is insignificant for the play; the witches are perfectly interchangeable. The focus in *Macbeth* is clearly on their group activities, as they are decisive for the plot’s development.

Summarising, one single witch could theoretically perform all tasks that the weird sisters do individually. They appear like one personality being split into three figures for the sake of the atmosphere and the supernatural powers depicted in the drama, without any witch harbouring skills or aims different from those of her sisters.

### 2.3.3 Round versus Flat Characters

Shakespeare created his weird sisters as a blend of the folk beliefs, fears, educated treatises and stereotypes of his time. The results were witches that were very obviously evil hags, and were perceived as scary and uncanny by the audience of Shakespeare’s days. Nowadays, however, they seem rather like flat caricatures to a modern reader.

Pratchett used Shakespeare’s witches as models for his own wyrd sisters but developed highly individual personalities. Each witch plays a special part in the novel and her character is designed to perfectly fit her specific purpose. Thus, if one witch would be substituted with another, the plot would collapse. The witches’ individual activities are as decisive for the plot of *Wyrd Sisters* as are their group actions. In addition, each witch has been given her own name, physical appearance, skills, talents and emotions by Pratchett, all of which Shakespeare’s witches lack. There are occasions in the novel when the wyrd sisters try to re-enact scenes from *Macbeth* that feature their Shakespearean counterparts. Usually, this re-enactment results in a failure on the wyrd sisters’ side, perceived by the reader as parody in both its mocking and criticising function.

Concluding, it can be argued that, in direct comparison, Shakespeare’s witches are flat and shallow characters, while Pratchett’s figures have numerous facets, depth and are rather round and three-dimensional characters. Also, in contrast to the weird sisters, Pratchett’s wyrd sisters keep developing their character traits throughout *Wyrd Sisters* and its sequels.

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47 Except, perhaps, the foreshadowing of Macbeth’s sleeplessness in *Macbeth* I.3. 14-24.
2.4. Acting as a group

2.4.1 Hierarchy

Pratchett designed his witches as being very anti-hierarchical. “Career progression” (Wyrd Sisters: 8) in his novels means that an older witch takes in a talented young girl for training\(^{48}\), establishing a master-apprentice relation. Before her death, she hands her territory over to her former student. This scenario has been and is practiced in all cultures wherever a master teaches his or her craft to a pupil. There are no indications in Macbeth as to how Shakespeare’s witches learned their craft. Since Hecate is their mistress, they might have gained some knowledge through her, yet nothing specific is mentioned in this respect.

In Wyrd Sisters, witches do not automatically have equal status in the witches’ community, and there are leaders, although not officially. As Pratchett formulated it, “Granny Weatherwax was the most highly-regarded of the leaders they didn't have” (ibid.). Every witch in Terry Pratchett’s novels has the inborn need to lead, which results in constant competition among them. None of his witches would ever admit that she is taking orders from anybody. In the universe of the Discworld novels, witches live according to their own codes and rules which allow them to ignore the fact that they, technically, are subjects to the king of Lancre.

In Macbeth, the weird sisters, and subsequently all other magically inclined women, are subjects to Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft\(^{49}\), from whom they appear to receive their powers and whose orders they carry out, although not always to her satisfaction. They are chided by her for getting involved with Macbeth the way they did, and for boasting with their skills in front of him without calling their master to the scene, thus denying her to do the same.

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\(^{48}\) In Pratchett’s Discworld novels, the magical talent is inborn and increased by lifelong training, which often involves a specialization in one or more fields. In The Folklore of Discworld (p.177), Pratchett and Simpson give accounts of historical wise women and men and their alleged sources of power which where generally non-human.

HECATE
And I, the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never called to bear my part
Or show the glory of our art?

(Macbeth III.4. 6-9)

Among the weird sisters no particular hierarchy is observable. They seem to be equals, which adds to their overall uniformity.

2.4.2 Sabbats and Covens

Historically, according to Pratchett and Simpson50, the combination of witches and covens is not very old. For centuries, witches have been associated with group gatherings, known as sabbats, during which they worshipped the devil, often involving orgies of some sort51. The peak of these superstitions was reached during the times of the great witch hunts and trials in Europe (from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century and from 1550 until 165052). The idea of peaceful covens was introduced much later, during the early twentieth century in England by the scholar Margaret Murray. According to Murray, witches used to come together in gatherings of thirteen and, during their sabbats they worshipped the powers of nature. While historians nowadays regard her theories as fanciful ideas without any historically proven foundations53, the Wiccan religion, founded in the mid-twentieth century, is largely based on her thoughts.

The coven in Wyrd Sisters is an exception among Terry Pratchett’s witches, as he designed them as being very territorial and uncooperative, especially when other witches are involved. Its importance, as far as the story of Weird Sisters is concerned, lies in its high amount of intertextuality, and its many parallels to its model in Macbeth. In Pratchett’s novel, the three wyrd sisters form a coven because its youngest member, Magrat Garlick, is of the opinion that witches should not be on their own all the time, as they have a tendency to develop strange ideas, the more extreme ones revolving around gingerbread houses and the kissing of frogs.

51 Pratchett is commenting on this in Wyrd Sisters, page 9: “‘She means a coven, Gytha,’ Granny Weatherwax explained. [...] ‘A knees up?’ said Nanny Ogg hopefully. ‘No dancing,’ Granny had warned. ‘I don’t hold with dancing. Or singing or getting over-excited or all that messing about with ointments and similar.”’
Since the figure of Magrat shows heavy influences from modern Wiccans and Neo-Pagans\textsuperscript{54}, it is reasonable that she should be the coven’s founder.

It’d been her [Magrat’s] idea to form a local coven. She felt it was more, well, occult. […]. It had seemed such a lovely idea. She’d had great hopes of the coven. She was sure it wasn’t right to be a witch alone, you could get funny ideas. She’d dreamed of wise discussions of natural energies while a huge moon hung in the sky, and then possibly they’d try a few of the old dances described in some of Goodie Whemper’s books. (\textit{Wyrd Sisters}: 8-9; 128).

Shakespeare’s weird sisters, when on stage, always act as a threesome and appear to be a successful team of equals. None of his witches, not even Hecate, is ever observed by herself. The numbers of witches seen in \textit{Macbeth} ranges from three to four to a total of seven witches in the great conjuring scene (\textit{Macbeth} IV.1.\textsuperscript{55}). This appearance in groups might be accounted for by the beliefs of Shakespeare’s contemporaries that witches gathered in large groups to hold their unholy ceremonies, while committing their mischievous crimes mostly individually. So do the weird sisters\textsuperscript{56}, except in the cases of the cursed sailor and Macbeth. Working together for a joined cause thus seems to be a more everyday matter than it would be for Pratchett’s Discworld witches, whose individual characters tend to clash with each other\textsuperscript{57}. Their coven is thus far less harmonious than the one in \textit{Macbeth}, which makes it more individual, while the ‘perfect’ coven in \textit{Macbeth} adds to the witches’ uniformity. What both groups have in common, are their meddling with Macbeth/Felmet, the time, place and weather conditions of their first meetings. Both covens gather at night\textsuperscript{58}, at an open place, during a storm, and one witch from each group screeches the same opening words: “When shall we three meet again?”\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} Pratchett, Simpson (2008: 169).
\textsuperscript{55} Between line 38 and 39: “\textit{Enter HECATE and the other three WITCHES}”.
\textsuperscript{56} See \textit{Macbeth} I.3. 1-3: “\textit{FIRST WITCH Where hast thou been, sister? / SECOND WITCH Killing swine. / THIRD WITCH Sister, where thou?”}
\textsuperscript{57} See \textit{Wyrd Sisters}: 121-124; Appendix p. 107, paragraph 7.17.
\textsuperscript{58} The folio does not explicitly say that the weird sisters meet at night, but it can be assumed as it would fit the atmosphere.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Macbeth} I.1.1; \textit{Wyrd Sisters}: 5.
2.4.3 Witches and ‘Normal’ People

In Wyrd Sisters and its sequels, each witch has her particular skills or field in which she is an expert. Granny Weatherwax, for instance, is a master of psychology, helping people by motivating them to help themselves. Further, she is able to send out her mind and have it enter that of other creatures, be it plant, insects, animals or humanoid species, an ability which is referred to as “borrowing” in Pratchett’s books. Nanny Ogg, on the other hand, relies more on her interpersonal capabilities. She knows everything about everybody in Lancre and many people seek her for advice on everyday matters. She is also the most called for midwife in Lancre. Magrat Garlick is an expert on herbs, which makes her a good practical doctor. The witches in *Macbeth*, in contrast, do not appear to have any unique skills, not even Hecate.

All of Pratchett’s witches tend to people’s needs, helping whenever they are called for and, as a rule, never ask for payment. That does not mean that they are poor, however. The villagers and farmers make sure that the witch in whose territory they live in is always well supported with food, clothing, and whatever else she might need. These facets of witchcraft are derived from accounts of historical wise women, some of which are told in *The Folklore of Discworld*. Thus, a circle of give and take is established and kept up.

This is in stark contrast to the relationship between the witches and the general population in Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, one of the witches recounts to her sisters how she expected to be given food by a sailor’s wife but was rejected. As a result, all three witches combine forces to take revenge, but instead of punishing the woman, they curse her innocent husband. Generally, they show a very unsocial behaviour towards normal people, delighting in causing mischief by destroying farmers’ fields and killing their cattle (cf. *Macbeth* I.2. 2).

Common to all of Pratchett’s witches is their belief that ‘normal’ people ought to show them respect. One way of ensuring this is to make everyone aware that they are doubtlessly facing a witch. Elements of modern popular culture such as black dresses, pointed hats, and piercing stares are among the preferred means of accomplishing this effect. These instruments are sometimes supported by a highly developed sense for drama that may involve shrieking door hinges, rocking chairs moving all by themselves, and small bottles containing coloured water.

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60 Pratchett, Simpson (2008: 176-177).
as potion substitutes. In *Wyrd Sisters*, it is explained to Duke Felmet that most people simultaneously afraid and proud of “their” witches. A village is considered fortunate if a witch is living there while facing an angry witch is seen as a height of misfortunate. Paradoxically, many witches are not particularly liked, though, as they are often regarded as dogmatic, arrogant, and interfering.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare leaves no doubt as to his witches’ status. The stage directions in the folio say “*Enter three WITCHES*”, while on stage costumes, makeup, lyrics and their overall attire make their profession obvious to the audience. They demand respect and spread fear in people’s minds. It cannot be denied that they, too, delight in meddling in the affairs of others, most notably in those of Macbeth. The important difference to Pratchett’s witches is that Shakespeare’s weird sisters’ meddling is exclusively evil, whereas Pratchett’s wyrd sisters generally seek the well-being of their fellow beings. Pratchett states this difference very explicitly: “It's not the meddlin' I object to,' said Granny Weatherwax, her chin on her hand. 'It's the evil meddling.” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 289). Terry Pratchett put a great emphasis on how different the relationship between his witches and the people of Lancre is compared to that of Shakespeare’s weird sisters and the people of Scotland. While the wyrd sisters try to help and protect the ‘normal’ people around them, the weird sisters delight in cursing innocents.

As Pratchett’s witches are so eager to be respected by their fellow people, the question arises as to why this respect is so important. An answer can be found in the history of witchcraft, and especially in the witch hunts during the reign of James I. of England. According to Stephen Greenblatt, James I. was downright paranoid about witches, suspecting them of conspiring against him and planning to murder him. His beliefs fuelled a violent witch mania, during which malevolent rumours and defamation of disliked neighbours would easily lead to the imprisonment, torture and death sentence of numerous alleged “witches”.

Seen in this light, being respected by normal people is a protection for the witches in *Wyrd Sisters*, and Felmet’s defaming campaign poses a severe threat to their status, and ultimately, their lives. It is thus understandable that Granny Weatherwax is far from happy when some of the bad rumours Felmet has been spreading about witches are related to her.

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61 For real life examples see Pratchett, Simpson (2008: 171 – 174).
63 *Macbeth* I.1.
64 Greenblatt (2009b: 30).
Shawn hopped from leg to another.

'Yes, m'm, but they says terrible things about you, m'm, savin' your presence, m'm.'

Granny stiffened. 'What things?'

' [...]'

'A lot of things what aren't true, m'm,' he said, establishing his credentials as early as possible. 'All sorts of things. Like, old Verence was a bad king and you helped him on the throne, and you caused that bad winter the other year, and old Norbut's cow dint give no milk after you looked at it. Lots of lies, m'm,' he added, loyally.

(Wyrd Sisters: 134).

These stories are reminiscent of the crimes arrested 'witches' were accused of having committed during the various witchcraft trials, in both Europe and the USA. One of Shakespeare's weird sisters also prides herself with having plagued farmers by killing their swine (Macbeth I.3. 2).

The situation in Wyrd Sisters is rapidly getting worse for the witches, and finally culminates in Granny Weatherwax almost being driven over by a horse-drawn cart. The question that Pratchett appears to be asking here is: When people do no longer care if they harm and injure another human being because they have heard an unpleasant rumour about them, how far is it till the hunting of witches and burning them on stakes? This threat the witches are facing is one of the most outspoken instances of criticism in all of Wyrd Sisters. Pratchett attacks the portrayal of witches as it is done in Macbeth, as it would not have helped to appease Shakespeare’s contemporaries, but would have furthered their scepticism and fear.

### 2.4.4 Recognizing a Witch

In both Macbeth and Wyrd Sisters, the witches’ physical appearance plays a role important enough to be observed more closely.

Terry Pratchett’s witches are perfectly normal, human women who may not be the greatest beauties but are not ugly either. Their special clothing style, black dresses and pointed hats derived from popular culture, are means of signalling to the people around them that they are dealing with a witch. Adherence to this costume is not an unbreakable rule, however, as the example of Magrat Garlick shows, who prefers colourful dresses and shows her profession by wearing a high amount of occult jewellery.

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65 Greenblatt (2009b: 30): “The accused were generally charged with maleficium, an evil deed – usually harming neighbors, causing destructive storms, or killing farm animals – […]”

66 See Appendix p. 112, paragraph 10.7.
In *Macbeth*, the focus is less on the witches’ style of clothing and more on their bodily features.

BANQUO  

[…] – What are these,  
So withered, and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th’inhabitants o’th’ earth  
And yet are on’t? – Live you, or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me  
By each at once her choppy finger laying  
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so.  

(*Macbeth* I.3. 36-45)

This description of the weird sisters makes it clear that Macbeth and Banquo are encountering ugly, uncanny hags, whose appearance seems chaotic and unnatural, especially since they show both male and female attributes. The lines furthermore indicate that they are all looking rather similar, which adds to their overall uniformity. Pratchett’s wyrd sisters, in comparison, show a certain amount of individuality, both in their physical features as in their preferred style of clothing.

2.4.5 Language

In addition to their unnatural appearance, the language of the weird sisters in *Macbeth* is another fact pointing to their function as agents of chaos. Instead of following a continuous style, the witches vary between poetic language, rhyme, and prose, in contrast to the other figures of the play. Their language is as unsteady and chaotic as themselves, thus reflecting the strange events that take place after the murder of King Duncan.

The witches’ language in *Wyrd Sisters*, in comparison, is usually normal, steady, and natural, showing a touch of a local dialect. Variations can be found in conversations about royal persons, or when the witches try to imitate Shakespeare’s witches, for example, in the conjuring scene67, when they quote and paraphrase the weird sisters’ charm in *Macbeth* IV.1. Whereas the scene and the doings of the witches in *Macbeth* are meant to cause fear in the watching audience, the wyrd sisters’ attempts seem comical and futile, a parody of *Macbeth*.

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67 See Appendix p. 106, paragraph 7.12.
2.4.6 ‘Fairy’ Godmothers

According to Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson, the tradition of fairy godmothers stems from Southern Europe, where it was believed that ‘supernatural women’ gave good wishes and gifts to new-born children. One of the most widely known examples for the involvement of fairy godmothers in folklore and fairy tales is the story of Sleeping Beauty, in which twelve good fairies bestow gifts on the little princess, while the evil thirteenth curses her. Cinderella also figures a fairy godmother helping the heroine to become a princess and reach her happy ending.

In the novel Wyrd Sisters, the three witches shape a child’s destiny by declaring themselves his (fairy) godmothers, each giving him a gift that determines his later life. Unable to formulate three wishes in unison, each witch makes an individual wish according to her current situation. The shy Magrat Garlick wishes that he will “make friends easily” (Wyrd Sisters: 53). Nanny Ogg, upon failing to recall one of the numerous verses of her favourite shanty, wishes that the boy will “always remember the words” (ibid). Granny, upset by all the pretending in a theatre performance watched earlier, wishes that he will “be whoever he thinks he is” (Wyrd Sisters: 54). As an unintentional result, their combined wishes create the perfect actor. The boy, named Tomjon, memorizes all words, be they spoken or written, instantly and permanently. Also, a talent for making friends cannot be denied, as most people take an instant liking to him. No matter which role he is made to play, he transforms himself completely, leaving his audience to believe that they saw a real woman, an old man, a troll or even Death himself on stage. When he decides to stay with his adoptive family instead of with his biologic relatives, a close friend observes how very much he resembles his “father”, because this is whom he wants to be like.

What is important for the story of Wyrd Sisters, apart from the witches’ meddling with destiny, is that their claim to be Tomjon’s godmothers establishes a link between them and the boy, who would not be alive without them. Important as this link is, its significance seems to be unapparent to the witches, as they actually fail to remember his name, a name that they

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gave to him. This is shown in an incomplete quote from *Macbeth*\(^69\), uttered before the women set out to meet their godchild for the first time after fifteen years.

In his Discworld novels, Terry Pratchett offers the reader his own definition of ‘fairy’ godmothers. After the events in *Wyrd Sisters* (1988) and its sequel *Witches Abroad* (1991), fairy godmothers on the Discworld are “a specialized form of witch with particular responsibility for the life of one individual or a group of individuals.”\(^70\)

### 2.4.7 Being ‘Psychically Inclined’

All of Terry Pratchett’s witches are “psychically inclined”\(^71\), i.e., they have the ability to see entities, such as ghosts, that are invisible to normal people. This skill is mentioned here, as it plays an important role in *Wyrd Sisters*. The ghost of the late king of Lancre, Verence, desperate to find someone to communicate with, lures the three witches to Lancre Castle.\(^72\) Their meeting with Verence is integral to the ghost’s individual storyline. What is of far more importance for the overall plot of the novel, though, is the fact that the witches meet the Duke and Duchess Felmet personally for the first time. During this confrontation, Duke Felmet, Pratchett’s equivalent of Macbeth, manages a hard blow against the witches, which is decisive for the continuation of the story.

The only ghost appearing in *Macbeth* is that of Banquo. Upon reading or watching this scene for the first time (*Macbeth* III.4.), the involvement of the weird sisters can be suspected. When the text is examined more closely, however, it becomes clear that it includes no hints of influence from the witches’ side. The absence of a connection between a ghost and the witches is a major difference between *Macbeth* and *Wyrd Sisters*. While in the latter, the wyrd sisters need the ghost as a mediator to establish personal contact with Felmet, the witches in Shakespeare’s play need no such device. Instead, they meet Macbeth out of their own free will and without intervention of a third party.

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\(^69\) “‘All hail wossname,’ she [Granny] said under her breath, ‘who shall be king here, after.’” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 274). The original reads: “THIRD WITCH All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!” (*Macbeth* I.3.48).

\(^70\) *Ibid*.

\(^71\) *Wyrd Sisters*: 30; Appendix p. 101, paragraph 2.

\(^72\) For further details see Appendix p. 106, 7.15.
In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, nothing hints at the weird sisters being able to perceive ghosts or entities other than their attendant evil spirits. Two of these spirits mentioned in the play are the grey cat Grimalkin and the toad Paddock. Stephen Greenblatt, in a footnote to *Macbeth* \(^\text{73}\), explains that they are either familiars or attendant spirits \(^\text{74}\). As familiars, they do not necessarily harbour magical powers. This means that they might very well be ordinary animals. A “SPIRIT LIKE A CAT” is listed in the “Persons of the Play” section on page 1353 of the *Norton Shakespeare*. This is problematic since he is listed as appearing in Act 3, scene 5, line 38, in a section of the scene involving Hecate’s song which might have been copied from Thomas Middleton’s play *The Witch* \(^\text{75}\). The spirit’s significance for this thesis is thus debatable. As for the evil spirits that are called on by Lady Macbeth in I.5 38–52, from merely reading the text it is not apparent whether or not these spirits actually show themselves, i.e., it cannot be said if they would be visible for a ‘normal’ human. What can be observed is that all familiars and spirits perceptible for the audience are only seen in scenes featuring only the witches. It thus remains unknown if mere mortals could behold them or not.

Generally, familiars and witches are a common combination in folklore. Even in modern popular culture, a witch is hardly ever depicted without a black cat or some other eerie animal at her side. Pratchett makes references to this practice early in *Wyrd Sisters* (p. 65), when Magrat Garlick presents a tortoise to her colleagues, claiming it to be her new “familiar”. As the tortoise is a perfectly normal rather than supernatural animal, the correct term for it ought to be “pet”. The only other witch keeping a pet is Nanny Ogg who owns a giant grey tomcat named Greebo \(^\text{76}\). However malicious Greebo may be, he is nonetheless a normal cat without any magical abilities. Throughout the novel there are no further references to familiars.

Their psychical inclination also makes the witches sensitive to changes in the land itself. When the land of Lancre “awakens” due to Duke Felmet’s aversion towards it, the witches and the ghost are the only figures to notice its troubled mind and to react accordingly. Thus, the wyrd sisters, especially Granny Weatherwax, act as a medium for the kingdom of Lancre. At first they only experience an odd sensation, the mind of something big and never having been perceived before. Unable to find a satisfying explanation for this phenomenon by

\(^{73}\) *Macbeth* I.1. 8-9.

\(^{74}\) Terry Pratchett and Jaqueline Simpson describe these familiars in *The Folklore of Discworld* (2008: 177) as “minor demons, usually in the form of toads, mice or cats, who were loaned to the witches by the Devil and would perform magical tasks in exchange for a few drops of blood.”


\(^{76}\) For Greebo’s role in *Wyrd Sisters* see Appendix p. 106-107, paragraph 7.15.
themselves, they decide to invoke a demon, an apparition reminiscent of the three apparitions conjured up in Macbeth IV.1. The demon tells them that:

‘There is nothing new in the kingdom,’ said the demon, ‘but the land has woken up.’
‘What do you mean?’ said Granny.
‘It’s unhappy. It wants a king that cares for it.’
(Wyrd Sisters: 97)

The witches still need some time and pondering before they can really understand and explain how a kingdom could be awake and have a mind.

‘The kingdom is worried,’ said Granny.
‘Yes, I already said.’
‘I didn’t mean the people, I meant the kingdom.’
[…]
‘That’s just about the land,’ said Granny. ‘It’s not the same as a kingdom. A kingdom is made up of all sorts of things. Ideas. Loyalties. Memories. It all sort of exists together. And then all of these things create some kind of life. Not a body kind of life, more like a living idea. Made up of everything that’s alive and what they’re thinking. And what the people before them thought.’
(Wyrd Sisters: 118-120)

The reason for the kingdom’s activities is that it senses the aversion of its new ruler Duke Felmet. At the time it is only worried and unhappy, but the witches are concerned about what might happen if the kingdom becomes truly angry.77

In Macbeth, there is no such connection between the weird sisters and Scotland. The ones to comment on the state of the kingdom are always mortals whose concern lies with the Scottish people and not really the land itself.

MACDUFF Bleed, bleed poor country!

[…]

MALCOLM I think our country sinks beneath the yoke.
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds.
(Macbeth IV.3. 32; 40-42)

“Scotland” here does stand for the nation as a whole, but the “bleeding” country is a metonymy referring to the people suffering under Macbeth, the humans who are killed and mistreated by the tyrant. Their blood might colour the earth red where it is spilled, but the land itself does not bleed. Terry Pratchett took up this idea of the suffering

77 See Appendix p. 107, paragraph 7.17.
country but, as he did with many other concepts, he took it literally and implemented it as something real into his Discworld novels.

The supernatural events in *Macbeth* that occur after King Duncan’s death are also not directly linked to the weird sisters. They are the effect of the regicide committed by Macbeth and the resulting disorder in the Chain of Being. The same holds true for the sudden stopping of supernatural activities in *Wyrd Sisters*. This is not the witches’ doing but the kingdom’s immediate reaction to the misrule of Felmet.

A third effect of the psychic inclination of Pratchett’s witches, is their awareness of being what the author terms “unfocused in time.” This awareness enables them to sense shadows of the future and predict it to a certain extent. In *Wyrd Sisters*, the reader encounters two significant predictions: the first is consciously made by Granny Weatherwax in the beginning of the novel, when she advises a soldier to flee from Lancre to the far away ocean to become a sailor, prophesying him a long and prosperous life; the second is her unconscious foreshadowing of the novel’s outcome, similar to the weird sisters’ hinting at Macbeth’s curse of sleeplessness after the regicide.

The prophecies of Shakespeare’s witches, in comparison, read like a list of some of the play’s main events, as far as they are related to the witches.

- First they predict the imminent end of a battle and their meeting with Macbeth the next day (*Macbeth* I.1.).
- They foreshadow Macbeth’s later sleeplessness (*Macbeth* I.3.).
- Most prominent is their prophecy of Macbeth becoming first Thane of Cawdor and later king of Scotland. For Banquo they tell that he himself will be less fortunate than Macbeth, but that his descendants would become kings (*Macbeth* I.3.).
- In *Macbeth* III.5. Hecate tells the three witches that Macbeth will seek them out at Acheron’s pit the next day to inquire about his destiny.

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78 It could be argued that they are, all in all, the result of the witches meddling with Macbeth, however.
79 See Chapter 3: *A Tale of Three Kings*.
80 See *Wyrd Sisters*: 44, 62.
81 A foretelling concerning a sailor can be found in *Macbeth* I.3.14-24. In *Wyrd Sisters*, the prediction is one of salvations, whereas in *Macbeth* it is a curse and promises torment.
82 Granny Weatherwax’s claim that Tomjon will be found in the giant twin-city Ankh-Morpork might be counted as a prediction as well. The statement is based less on looking into the future, though, than on her experience with the ways of destiny.
In *Macbeth* IV.1., the arrival of Macbeth is announced in advance by one of the weird sisters who remarks on her pricking thumbs. This is the only instance of a witch explaining the source of her knowledge. A comment on this practice can be found in *Wyrd Sisters*:17:

> ‘Something comes,’ [Granny] said.
> ‘Can you tell by the pricking of your thumbs?’ said Magrat earnestly. Magrat had learned a lot about witchcraft from books.
> ‘The pricking of my ears,’ said Granny.

Voiced here is a soft criticism of naively believing everything that has been read in a book instead of using one’s common sense.

Finally, there are the predictions that the three apparitions, after having been invoked by Hecate and the witches, give Macbeth. The first warns him openly to beware Macduff. The second seemingly contradicts the first by telling him that only a man not having been born by a woman can defeat him, a thing unimaginable for Macbeth. Unfortunately, he will later take the apparition’s advice to be ‘bloody’ and ‘bold’ (*Macbeth* IV.1. 95) literally by ordering the slaughter of Macduff’s family. The third apparition proclaims that Macbeth will be safe from all harm until “Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him” (*Macbeth* IV.1. 109-110). Again, the tyrant is sure that this is impossible. At the end of the tragedy, however, the apparitions’ prophecies will prove to be as deceptive as they are true. The important question is: what are these apparitions? Are they really the witches’ “masters” as the women tell Macbeth (IV.1. 78-79), or are they demons comparable to the one invoked by Pratchett’s wyrd sisters? The decisive hint to answering this question is to be found a few scenes earlier, in Act III, scene 5. Here, Hecate gives an explicitly detailed account of how the witches would perform a charm in IV.1. that should produce artificial spirits, i.e. illusions strong enough to draw Macbeth further along his path of violence and damnation

**HECATE**

> Upon the corner of the moon
> There hangs a vap'rous drop profound.
> I’ll catch it ere it come to ground,
> And that, distilled by magic sleights,
> Shall raise such artificial sprites
> As by the strength of their illusion
> Shall draw him on to his confusion.

(*Macbeth* III.5. 23-29).
She also describes the consequences of their deception of Macbeth.

HECATE

He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes ‘bove wisdom, grace and fear;
And you all know security
Is mortals’ chiepest enemy.
(Macbeth III.5. 30-33).

Furthermore contradicting the witches’ claim to be presenting their masters to Macbeth is Hecate’s fury about the weird sisters’ disrespectful behaviour towards her, their mistress, in Macbeth III.5. 683.

It can be concluded that the apparitions in IV.1. are thus products of the witches’ conjuring, artificial illusions made to tell Macbeth exactly what the witches want them to predict84. The “cauldron scene” in Macbeth IV.1. is paraphrased in Wyrd Sisters in two different parts of the novel, once when the witches conduct a charm to draw Tomjon back to Lancre, and the other time during a play written and staged for Duke Felmet.

Finally it should be pointed out that the witches in Pratchett’s Wyrd Sisters never make any prophecies for Duke Felmet. Also, the demon they invoke is meant to give them information, not to confuse anybody else.

**Summary**

Pratchett’s wyrd sisters, although being based to a certain extent on Shakespeare’s witches, are in many ways the complete opposites of the weird sisters. They are the main characters of Wyrd Sisters, being prominent throughout the novel whose plot revolves around their actions and decisions. They are good characters who try to protect their people and free their country from the evil usurper Felmet, whom they oppose. Compared to the weird sisters’ function as harbingers of chaos, they are proponents of order, which they are trying to restore. They are agents of parody as well as criticism. Their involvement with temptation confines itself to showing their godson Tomjon, the rightful heir of the throne of Lancre, around the kingdom, who is, unfortunately, neither very impressed by the sights nor tempted to reign in the

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83 See the paragraph 2.4.1 Hierarchy.
84 Seen in a modern light, the witches’ insistence that Macbeth must not address the apparitions and try to communicate with them reminds a reader nowadays of a pre-recorded message, a trick that could easily be exposed without such precautions.
country. What they have in common with their Shakespearean models is their influence on an individual’s fate and their help in establishing a new king.

The function of the intertextual references in Wyrd Sisters is to establish a clear connection between Pratchett’s wyrd and Shakespeare’s weird sisters. Intertextual references in Wyrd Sisters work in two ways: When they are referred to as “traditions”, Pratchett’s witches usually fail to interpret the quoted passages correctly, which results in humorous scenes, i.e., parody. When Pratchett’s witches see their “Shakespearean” portrayal in Felmet’s play, which paraphrases, among others, witches scenes from Macbeth, they are shocked at the distorted depiction of witches and their doings. Here, the intertextual references serve to clearly differentiate between the two groups and to criticise Shakespeare’s flat characters and the negative stereotypes they represent, such as witches being evil hags that cause mischief for evil’s sake, compared to Pratchett’s round, “human” witches.
Chapter 3: A Tale of Three Kings

In *Wyrd Sisters*, Terry Pratchett’s King Verence of Lancre is to some extent modelled after Shakespeare’s King Duncan of Scotland (*Macbeth*), and King Hamlet of Denmark (*Hamlet*), with influences from Claudius (*ibid.*). What all of these three kings have most prominently in common is that they are all murdered by a usurper at the beginning of their respective texts. While they are alive, the kings are of minor importance, their deaths, combined with other elements, however, trigger whole plots.

### 3.1 The Role of the Kings

In *Wyrd Sisters*, the murder of King Verence together with the kidnapping of his infant son Tomjon triggers the novel’s plot, thus making the death necessary for *Wyrd Sisters*. In *Macbeth*, the situation is similar: the tragedy is to a great part set in motion by the murder of King Duncan by his cousin Macbeth. The story of *Hamlet*, however, is somewhat different. Here, it is not the murder that triggers the plot, as nobody at the beginning of the play is aware that the old king did not die a natural death. To establish awareness of the murder, Shakespeare used the figure of the old king’s Ghost, who reports the regicide to his son, Prince Hamlet, and the audience, and calls on young Hamlet for revenge. Thus, not the death of the king *per se*, but his ghost’s wish for revenge triggers the tragedy.

On a different level, Verence’s death and the misrule of Duke Felmet cause the kingdom to awaken, and magical occurrences, that were part of the daily life of the Lancre inhabitants, to suddenly stop. An order has been disrupted and has to be re-established. The same holds true for Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

King Verence is one of Pratchett’s main means of establishing an intertextual connection between his Discworld novel and Shakespeare’s plays. He is a parody and critique of the playwright’s good and “gracious” (*Macbeth…*) kings, an instrument for distinguishing “real” royalty (*Wyrd Sisters*: 161) from illegitimate rulers such as Duke Felmet, and also plays with stereotypes about medieval feudal lords.
3.2 The Living Kings

3.2.1 Appearance, Personality and Reign

As there is no way of showing readers what a character looks like in a novel, the author has to *tell* them. For this reason, Pratchett included many details about Verence’s outer appearance and his personality in *Wyrd Sisters*. The descriptions of his appearance are provided by Verence himself, ironically when his ghost looks down at his dead body: “It was a pretty good body, incidentally, now he came to see it from outside for the first time. [...] It was big and well-muscled. He'd looked after it. He'd allowed it a moustache and long-flowing locks. He'd seen it got plenty of healthy outdoor exercise and lots of red meat.” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 10).

Opinions about Verence’s personality are voiced by members of different social classes, most notably the court jester and the three witches, with the omniscient narrator adding more information throughout *Wyrd Sisters*. The reader learns that Verence had a “terrible temper” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 67), was proud, disciplined, fearless and probably overly self-confident, as he ignored the threat coming from his cousin Duke Leonal Felmet. His temper usually showed in him burning down the cottages of villagers whenever he was in a rage, as the witches relate:

‘What about this new duke, then,’ said Nanny, [...] Granny sat back. 'He had some houses burned down in Bad Ass,’ she said. 'Because of taxes.’

‘[...]’

‘Old King Verence used to do that,’ said Nanny. 'Terrible temper he had.’

'He used to let people get out first, though,’ said Granny.

(*Wyrd Sisters*: 67).

He would, however, pay for the rebuilding, something the duke does not. In his relationship to the witches, he greatly differs from Duncan and old Hamlet. Neither of the Shakespearean kings had any doings with witches; the only character who interacts with them is Macbeth. His relationship to the weird sisters is a fatal one for him – being inspired by their prophecy of his kingship, he murders his well-meaning cousin Duncan, turns into a bloodthirsty tyrant, is cursed with sleeplessness and madness, and can only be stopped by decapitation. Verence, in contrast, treats the witches with utmost respect and sends them presents occasionally. It should be mentioned that, unlike Shakespeare’s evil hags, Pratchett’s witches are the good
protagonists of *Wyrd Sisters*. Thus a relationship to them is far less problematic as in *Macbeth*.85

While Verence was very anxious to use his royal rights to their fullest, he was also generous, thus making up for many of his flaws of character. One of these royal rights he used to exercise was the “droit de seigneur”, a paraphrasing of “droit du seigneur”, a king's or high lord's right to spend the first night with a bride from the lower classes86. In compensation, he made sure to send money and articles for the wedding so that the couple would have a good start in their new life, thus proving his good will towards his subjects. His favourite past times included hunting and hawking, as well as wassailing, carousing and feasting at big banquets, which resembles the behaviour of Claudius in *Hamlet*. Another of his habits as listed by Pratchett was man-hunting. The men, criminals, were pardoned after the hunt, if the king was satisfied with the run. Considering all his character flaws, it is surprising that he, unlike his virtuous Shakespearean models, was neither caught up in a war (*Hamlet*), nor in a rebellion (*Macbeth*)87.

Shakespeare, in comparison, is rather sparse with descriptions and details about his kings. As his medium is that of theatre, and his plays are meant to be enacted on stage and not merely read, he focuses on showing the audience what his kings were like, which also gives the actors and directors much creative freedom. Therefore, a reader of *Macbeth* only learns that, physically, Duncan was an old man. Nothing is known about his interests or favourite pastimes. Rare details about his personality make him appear like a good and generous but also a naive man, who could not imagine a kinsman planning his death. He was loved at least by the Scottish aristocracy, whose members are the only ones to give accounts of his personality and reign, frequently using the term “gracious”88 and even “sainted”89 (*Macbeth* IV.3. 100). Terry Pratchett makes fun of this frequent use of the word “gracious” by having it used wrongly throughout *Wyrd Sisters*:

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85 For more details on witches see Chapter 2: *Witches wyrd and weird.*
87 At the beginning of *Macbeth*, the audience encounters the end of a battle between King Duncan’s forces and an army of rebels (*Macbeth* I.2.). In the first act of *Hamlet*, the audience is told that a war is raging between Denmark, Norway and Poland, which was started by the deceased King Hamlet (*Hamlet* I.1.78–106).
88 In *Macbeth*, “gracious” appears to be used to generally refer to kings: in combination with Duncan the term can be found three times (*Macbeth* III.1.66, III.6.3, and III.6.10), referring to the English king two times (*Macbeth* IV.3.44; 190), and addressing Macbeth again two times (*Macbeth* V.3.31 and V.5.28).
89 “MACDUFF […] Thy royal father/ was a most sainted king.” (*Macbeth* IV.3. 99-100).
'He had some houses burned down in Bad Ass,' she said. 'Because of taxes.'

[...]

'Old King Verence used to do that,' said Nanny. 'Terrible temper he had.'

'He used to let people get out first, though,' said Granny.

'Oh yes,' said Nanny, who was a staunch royalist. 'He could be very gracious like that.

[...].' (Wyrd Sisters: 67).

'That's kings for you,' said Granny. 'They come and go, good and bad. His father poisoned
the king we had before.'

'That was old Thargum,' said Nanny Ogg. 'Had a big red beard, I recall. He was very
gracious too, you know.' (Wyrd Sisters: 69).

'The old king used to shout at them and kick them out of the castle, mind. He used to say
he didn't have no time for shopkeepers and such,' she added, with a note of personal
approval. 'But he was always very gracious about it,' said Nanny Ogg. (Wyrd Sisters:
118).

'Old King Gruneweld, for one, he wouldn't have wasted time waving things around and
menacing people. It'd been bang, needles right under the fingernails from the word go,
and no messing. None of this evil laughter stuff. He was a real king. Very gracious.'

(Wyrd Sisters: 161).

All of these comments stem from the Lancre witches. As Pratchett created them to generally
misunderstand and misuse quotes from Shakespeare’s plays, it can be assumed that it is the
same with “gracious”, as their use of the word differs so greatly from its use in Macbeth.

Hamlet is more informative; about old Hamlet’s physical appearance, a reader learns that he
had a silver beard, and curly hair. As in Wyrd Sisters, all descriptions are given after his death.
According to his son, Prince Hamlet, he was fairly handsome, as the youth tries to call to his
mother’s mind in Hamlet III.4. 52-62:

HAMLET

Look here upon this picture, and on this,—
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill:
A combination and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man;
This was your husband.

Young Hamlet’s report on his father’s qualities has to be regarded with care, as the young man
shows strong tendencies of glorifying and idolizing the dead king. By comparing him to
several Roman gods, he transforms King Hamlet into a symbolic figure of kingly greatness. Other accounts of the king are given mostly by soldiers and aristocrats, and depict old Hamlet as a good king and proud warrior fighting for his country. Ironically, these fights took place in a war against Norway and Poland that the dead king began himself. Also, similarly to Pratchett’s King Verence, he looked down on his younger brother Claudius, believing his own qualities to be better than the other’s.\textsuperscript{90}

3.2.2 “Real” vs. “Symbolic” Kings

The reason why the living kings are analysed in this chapter, although they themselves are rather unimportant for Shakespeare’s plays and Pratchett’s novel, is the discrepancy between Shakespeare’s “virtuous” kings and Pratchett’s flawed character. The adjectives mainly used for Duncan and old Hamlet are “good”, “gracious”, even “sainted”, they are well liked, and in old Hamlet’s case, even compared to Roman gods. One reason for the focus on their virtuousness might be to differentiate the real, good kings from the evil usurpers who murder them. Rather than humans, however, they appear like symbols of kingly greatness, and stereotypes of ideal rulers. The wars and rebellions they face are only of marginal importance and serve mostly to introduce them. They seem like mere outlines of kings and are flat characters; accounts of their personal lives are close to non-existent; they are portrayed as, almost, flawless. All these facets make them rather uninteresting for the audience; what really matters in the tragedies are their deaths.

Pratchett’s Verence of Lancre, in comparison, is a very “human” character. The details about his physical appearance, personality and rule give him a depth that the Shakespearean kings lack, which results in him being a rounder character than they are; in some ways, he appears like a distorted image of the Shakespearean kings. He is mentioned and thus present throughout \textit{Wyrd Sisters}, which leads readers to think about him, depict him in their minds and perhaps even like or dislike the character. The way he is portrayed and remembered by the other characters makes him a means of differentiating between the usurper Duke Felmet and “real” kings (\textit{Wyrd Sisters}: 161). Due to the behaviour, habits, and good and bad qualities that Pratchett employed to create his king, Verence resembles a stereotypical feudal lord more than Shakespeare’s “sainted” kings.

\textsuperscript{90}“GHOST […] a wretch whose natural gifts were poor / To those of mine!” \textit{(Hamlet} I.4. 51-52).
3.3 Death

3.3.1 Murder

In Terry Pratchett’s *Wyrd Sisters*, King Verence is killed in his own castle, at night. This correlates with the circumstances of King Duncan’s death in *Macbeth*. Unlike the Shakespearean king, however, Verence was wide awake at the time, and either climbing up or down a staircase. Here he is attacked and stabbed to death by his cousin, Duke Felmet, who had been lurking in the shadows. Like his model Macbeth, Felmet is supported by his ambitious wife, Duchess Felmet. The most important difference between Verence’s murder and those of the Shakespearean kings, perhaps, is that in *Wyrd Sisters* a witness watched the crime.\(^91\)

Chronologically, Verence dies a short time before the beginning of the novel. The first time readers encounter him is immediately after his death, when Verence’s ghost observes his own corpse.

Duncan, too, is murdered by a kinsman, his cousin Macbeth, whom he has visited at his castle. While Verence is awake at the time of his death, Duncan is asleep, sure that no danger would threaten him. His time of death is near the beginning of the play, in act 2, scene 2, i.e., the audience actually sees him alive.

King Hamlet, finally, has in common with Duncan that he was murdered in his sleep. He used to take afternoon-naps in his orchard, a habit of which his brother Claudius took advantage when he poisoned the sleeping king. On a chronological level, he died before the onset of the play, as does Verence in *Wyrd Sisters*. While Verence’s death has only happened ‘minutes’ before the reader encounters his ghost, old Hamlet is already two months dead at the tragedy’s beginning\(^92\).

Common to all texts is that a king that was regarded as a good ruler is killed by an envious relative to gain control over a kingdom. However, the greatest similarities between the deaths of the individual kings can be found in *Wyrd Sisters* and *Macbeth*; except for their activities at the time – the one being asleep while the other was awake – Pratchett kept for once very

\(^{91}\) See Appendix p. 123, paragraph 13.3.

\(^{92}\) “HAMLET But two months dead – […]” (*Hamlet* I.2. 138).
closeto his model text, *Macbeth*. The way his king dies is highly referential of Shakespeare’s play, with hardly any deviations.

### 3.3.2 Reactions

The reactions of the other characters to the respective regicides are very different. In *Wyrd Sisters*, being murdered is regarded a “natural” cause of death, ironically because so many rulers already found a violent death in the past\(^93\). Old characters, such as the witches Granny Weatherwax and Gytha Ogg, have outlived at least two or three kings before the usurper Felmet got a hold of the kingdom. The people of Lancre are therefore rather unimpressed by the latest regicide and willing to accept it. The only characters that appear really affected by the death are the two conspirators Duke and Duchess Felmet\(^94\).

Duncan’s death, in comparison, comes as a shock to the people of Shakespeare’s Scotland, and is moaned at least by some aristocratic characters in *Macbeth*, who condemn the crime. Nevertheless, the burial rites are merely finished when Macbeth is already crowned new king of Scotland. As for old Hamlet, in the beginning of *Hamlet*, nobody knows that his violent death was not an accident, but murder. Generally, the mood at Elsinore Castle seems to be optimistic; the only one really being in mourning is young Hamlet. The old king’s wife, on the contrary, got married to Claudius only two months after her first husband’s burial. Claudius himself appears to be quite satisfied with the way that everything turned out. When old Hamlet’s ghost tells the prince about the regicide, he is shocked and upset. He does not tell anybody else about the crime, however, and only hints at something being wrong\(^95\).

Obviously, the reactions to the kings’ deaths in *Wyrd Sisters* and Shakespeare’s plays could not be any more different; while in the former the characters are quite willing to accept the regicide as a natural death, and are furthermore well aware of what happened, Shakespeare’s characters react with shock, sadness, or satisfaction. With Pratchett, it seems that his characters are seeing the world in a survival-of-the-fittest kind of way, accepting death and change as it comes (a reflection of more realistic attitudes of medieval times?), while in

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\(^93\) Cf. *Wyrd Sisters*: 22; 69; 120; 161.

\(^94\) This is an example of dramatic irony, i.e., the discrepancy between the knowledge of different characters, or the reader/audience and the character.

\(^95\) *Hamlet* I.5. 139-141.
Shakespeare’s tragedies, due to Elizabethan and Jacobean world views, regicide equals a crime against the natural order of things.\textsuperscript{96}

\textbf{3.3.4 Cover-Ups}

Duke Felmet and his wife, in \textit{Wyrd Sisters}, being unaware of the opinion of the common people, believe that they have to cover-up the crime. According to them, the drunken Verence stumbled on the stairs and fell into his own dagger. They even have Verence’s personal doctor confirm the cause of death to be an accident and thus natural. Members of his bodyguard who are unwilling to believe this, quickly become the victims of similar accidents.

\begin{quote}
It had, however, been declared by his own physician to be a case of natural causes. Bentzen had gone to see the man and explained that falling down a flight of steps with a dagger in your back was a disease caused by unwise opening of the mouth. In fact it had already been caught by several members of the king's own bodyguard who had been a little bit hard of hearing. There had been a minor epidemic. \textit{(Wyrd Sisters: 27)}.
\end{quote}

Anybody who so much as hints at Duke Felmet having murdered the king is severely punished:

\begin{quote}
'Only now no-one must say Felmet killed the king,' said Magrat. 'What?' said Granny. 'He had some people executed in Lancre, the other day for saying it,' Magrat went on. 'Spreading malicious lies, he said. He said anyone saying different will see the inside of his dungeons, only not for long. [...]'. \textit{(Wyrd Sisters: 69)}.
\end{quote}

In this, Pratchett’s characters are trying to imitate their Shakespearean models, but since such a procedure is unnecessary in the fictitious Lancre, they miserably fail\textsuperscript{97}. In \textit{Macbeth} and \textit{Hamlet}, however, covering up the murders is essential for the villains, as they would otherwise be prosecuted for their crimes.

Another death with lethal consequences for a king’s servants is that of Duncan. Lady Macbeth makes two of his personal servants drunken, and while they are asleep, the villains smear them with Duncan’s blood and put the blood-stained daggers into their hands. When the crime

\textsuperscript{96} See paragraph 3.3.5, \textit{Consequences}.

\textsuperscript{97} See Chapter 5: \textit{Villain, Villain}. 
is discovered, Macbeth quickly kills the two in a “pious rage” (Macbeth III.6. 11-16)\(^98\), as to avoid further questionings of his scapegoats. At first, it seems as if the other characters would accept this version of events, except for Banquo who suspects foul play by Macbeth. Later, when Macbeth indulges more and more in his thirst for blood, people begin to doubt his innocence, but do not dare to talk about it openly, as they fear the tyrant’s wrath.

In Hamlet the audience encounters a different situation. Here it is claimed that a poisonous snake bit old Hamlet while he was taking his usual afternoon-nap in his garden. Until the appearance of the ghost, this is generally believed by all, even by his melancholic son.

The necessary or unnecessary covering up of regicides is an example of how Pratchett plays with the Shakespearean texts; he takes a vital necessity, i.e., claiming innocence after having committed a crime, and turns it into a pointless and frustrating exercise for his villains, of whom one is driven into madness by his fear of being found out and convicted. This is Duke Felmét’s personal experience of dramatic irony, as it is depicted in more detail in Chapter 5: Villain, villain.

### 3.3.5 Consequences

No matter how different the causes of death and the characters’ reactions to the regicides are, they all have dire consequences. The prevailing order has been destroyed in all three texts, and must be restored.

In Macbeth and Hamlet, the murder of the king is accounted for as a great sin which will ultimately result in chaos. This belief is connected to the “Great Chain of Being”\(^99\), a concept prevailing during Shakespeare’s lifetime. It presupposes that everything in existence has its fixed place in a rigid hierarchy which is depicted as a chain leading from God down to the angels, humans, animals, plants and finally inanimate objects such as stones and metals. Each category is divided into further subdivisions. In the realm of humanity, for instance, the king

\(^{98}\) “LENNOX How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight, / In pious rage, the two delinquents tear / That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep? / Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too, / For ’twould have anger’d any heart alive / To hear the men deny’t.” (Macbeth III.6. 11-16).

is on top of the chain, the slave at the bottom, with bishops, aristocrats and free people in-between.

The Great Chain of Being (a basic model)

![Diagram of the Great Chain of Being]

Analogous with the Chain of Being goes the idea of correspondences between individual realms, i.e., like God rules everything, the sun rules the planets, the King rules his people, the father the family and the mind the body. All these realms not only correspond to each other, they are also interdependent. As a consequence, if there is disturbance in one realm, there is disturbance in another realm as well.

This disruption and chaos express themselves in several ways in Macbeth. First of all, the murder of a king is seen as “unnatural” because a higher, or the highest being in the chain has been killed by a lesser person. Also, Macbeth was written during the reign of James I, who insisted on the king being God’s representative on earth, so that a crime against him would be a crime against the Lord. In this light, the murder of Duncan would not only be a crime against a human person, but a violation of God’s representative. Second, the disruption in the Chain of Being causes another realm, nature, to go havoc. Scotland suffers from terrible storms, there is night when it should be daytime, birds of prey are killing each other, and domestic animals revolt against humans and eat each other.

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100 Greenblatt (2009a: 1344).
ROSS   Ha, good father,  
      Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act,  
      Threaten his bloody stage. By th' clock 'tis day,  
      And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.  
      Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame  
      That darkness does the face of earth entomb  
      When living light should kiss it?

OLD MAN   'Tis unnatural,  
      Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last  
      A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place,  
      Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.

ROSS   And Duncan's horses - a thing most strange and certain -  
      Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
      Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
      Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would  
      Make war with mankind.

OLD MAN   'Tis said they eat each other.
ROSS    They did so, to the amazement of mine eyes  
      That look'd upon't.  

(Macbeth II.4. 4-21)

Thirdly, there is disturbance in the minds of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Due to a curse of sleeplessness that they brought onto them by murdering the defenceless Duncan, and fear of being found out, both characters go mad. On the supernatural level, Banquo’s ghost might be counted as a disturbance, if he is not a product of Macbeth’s crazed imagination.

Similarly, disturbances can be found in Hamlet. Unlike in Macbeth, nature seems unaffected. The human realm, however, is greatly disturbed. First of all, there is the “unnatural” murder of a king; even worse, Claudius committed fratricide, a biblical crime. Second, the marriage between a former brother- and sister-in-law was seen as incestuous at the time101, thus Claudius and Gertrude are acting against nature. Third, there is Prince Hamlet’s madness. He tells his comrades that it is only feigned (Hamlet I.5. 171-173), although the reason is unclear. The boundaries between pretence and a real decease of the mind in Hamlet are blurring more and more throughout the play, however. Another character’s mind is crazed as well; Ophelia’s mind, upon being rejected by her loved one Hamlet, and shell-shocked by the murder of her father, is maddened. Fourth, her violent death, if it was suicide, was an unnatural death, as it is against God’s law to take one’s own life.102 Finally, there is something gravely wrong on the

101 Greenblatt (2009c: 1085): “English canon law forbade marriage between former brother- and sister-in-law (Leviticus 18:16; Book of Common Prayer); […] The relationship between Claudius and Gertrude could thus be regarded as incestuous.”

102 “FIRST CLOWN  Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully / seeks her own salvation?” (Hamlet V.7. 1-2); Greenblatt (2009c: 1152): “[S]uicide was a mortal sin. Ordinarily, suicides would not receive a “Christian burial” (in consecrated ground with the church’s blessing and ritual).”
supernatural level, as is proven by the appearance of the ghost. The dead walking among the living can be counted as most abnormal.

In *Wyrd Sisters*, disturbances similar to those in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* can be found in the supernatural realm and within humans. Verence’s ghost is regarded as an irregularity by the death of the Discworld, and Duke Felmet succumbs more and more into madness throughout the novel. The chaos in nature is less a result of the regicide than a reaction of the kingdom of Lancre to its maltreatment by Felmet. As can be read in more detail in the Appendix, as well as Chapter 2 and 5, the land itself awakens. Wild animals show a strange behaviour; instead of killing each other, as the animals do in *Macbeth*, predators and herbivores are brought together by the ‘mind’ of Lancre; the first time this happens, they are grouped together peacefully in front of a witch’s cottages. At the second instance, they combine forces to kill Duchess Felmet. Other ‘unnatural’ events include the sudden stop of supernatural occurrences that are a part of daily life in Lancre, which causes great shock and worries in the people:

> The Ramtops, which as it were lay across the Disc's vast magical standing wave like an iron bar dropped innocently across a pair of subway rails, were so saturated with magic that it was constantly discharging itself into the environment. People would wake up in the middle of the night, mutter, 'Oh, it's just another bloody portent', and go back to sleep. Hogswatchnight came round, marking the start of another year. And, with alarming suddenness, nothing happened.
> The skies were clear, the snow deep and crusted like icing sugar.
> The freezing forests were silent and smelled of tin. The only things that fell from the sky were the occasional fresh showers of snow.
> A man walked across the moors from Razorback to Lancre town without seeing a single marshlight, headless dog, strolling tree, ghostly coach or comet, and had to be taken in by a tavern and given a drink to unsteady his nerves.
> The stoicism of the Ramtoppers, developed over the years as a sovereign resistance to the thaumaturgical chaos, found itself unable to cope with the sudden change. It was like a noise which isn't heard until it stops.
> (*Wyrd Sisters*: 79, 80).

Generally, the theme of a disturbance in the Chain of Being is less thoroughly expressed in *Wyrd Sisters* than in Shakespeare’s tragedies. The effects and consequences of the regicides are similar, yet Pratchett offers a different explanation for the strange behaviour of his fictitious kingdom. A reason, therefore, may be that Pratchett, as a contemporary author, is writing for a modern audience, who are usually not familiar with the Renaissance concept of the Chain of Being. In order to keep to the Shakespearean models, he had to find a way of

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103 See Appendix p. 126, paragraph 13.9, Chapter 2: *Witches Wyrd and Weird*, and Chapter 5: *Villain, Villain*. 55
presenting such chaos to his readers without having to include too much historical background information or long explanations into his novel. Since the genre he is writing in is fantasy, he has certain creative freedoms, as his readers are more willing to accept a living kingdom, than, for instance, the audience of a Shakespearean play would be.

### 3.3.6 Order Restored

In all three texts, an order is disturbed and needs to be restored. In all cases, this process involves the violent death of the usurpers. In *Wyrd Sisters*, Duke Felmet dies when he falls off one of the castle’s battlements into the gorge underneath, while his wife is killed by the animals of Lancre Forest. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth allegedly commits suicide, while her husband is killed in a duel by Macduff, who later carries his head around on a pole. In *Hamlet*, finally, all major characters die\textsuperscript{104}, except for young Hamlet’s friend Horatio.

After the villains have been punished, the rightful heir to the throne, or a worthy substitute, takes over the rule. In *Wyrd Sisters*, King Verence’s legitimate son Tomjon rejects the crown, so his half-brother, the Fool or Verence II, is made king, to everybody’s satisfaction. In *Macbeth*, Duncan’s older son Malcolm, whom he had chosen as his successor at the beginning of the play (*Macbeth* I.4. 37-39), becomes the new king of Scotland. It has been foreshadowed by the witches, however, that Malcolm’s line will not last for long, and that Banquo’s heirs will become kings (*Macbeth* I.3 65, 84; IV.1. 117-141). In *Hamlet*, the Norwegian prince Fortinbras is made the rightful successor of old Hamlet by young Hamlet giving him his consent and blessing (*Hamlet* V.2. 296-297).

Concluding, there is a little flaw in each succession; in two cases (*Wyrd Sisters* and *Hamlet*) it is not the ‘real’ heir who wins over the usurper and takes the throne, whereas in the third case, *Macbeth*, the proper successor becomes king, but the audience knows that, at some point in the future, a different person will become ruler. Nevertheless, for the time being, the ‘natural’ order of things has been re-established in all three texts alike.

\textsuperscript{104} Queen Gertrude dies by drinking poisoned wine that Claudius had meant for Hamlet, Laertes is stabbed by Hamlet in a duel, Hamlet dies of poisoning because Laertes’s sword was trenched in a venomous potion, and Claudius is stabbed by Hamlet (*Hamlet* V.2. 232-301).
Summary

Although the living kings do not play a great role in either the novel or the plays, they are an important means of establishing intertextuality between Pratchett’s fantasy novel and Shakespeare’s tragedies, as well as an instrument of parody and criticism. By comparing them, it is possible to distinguish between flat characters like Shakespeare’s kings, and round characters like Pratchett’s King Verence, between Shakespeare’s ‘symbolic’ kings and Pratchett’s more ‘human’ characters, as well as between ‘real’ royalty and usurpers.

The deaths of the kings, in contrast, are vital for the plays and *Wyrd Sisters*, as they trigger the plots of the respective texts. There are certain differences between the triggers, however. In two cases, *Macbeth* and *Wyrd Sisters*, the murders are immediately known and reacted to. In *Hamlet*, the reactions and consequences are delayed, as it takes the appearance of old Hamlet’s ghost to make the audience and Prince Hamlet aware of the crime. The way the other characters, as well as nature and the supernatural realm, respond to the deaths vary as well. In *Wyrd Sisters*, regicide is so common that it is regarded as a natural cause of death for kings and not really worth worrying about. In Shakespeare’s tragedies, it is probably the worst crime possible, as in the Elizabethan and Jacobean world view it is an act against the natural order of things, i.e., the Great Chain of Being. In all three texts, a disturbance on several realms ensues after the crimes, although the reasons for it are not entirely the same. In *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, it is the kings’ violent deaths that are responsible for the chaos that threatens their kingdoms, whereas in *Wyrd Sisters*, the kingdom reacts less to the regicide and more to Duke Felmet’s misrule. In either case, order needs to be re-established, which happens in very similar ways and with the same outcomes: the usurpers die and rightful or approved successors take the throne.

To conclude: more contrasts can be found between the living kings of Shakespeare and Pratchett, while Pratchett keeps close to the Shakespearean models when it comes to the death of his king and the resulting events.
Chapter 4: Villain, villain

What is *Macbeth* about? The life and deeds of an aristocrat and warrior named Macbeth. Since *Wyrd Sisters* is a parody of *Macbeth*, it must naturally have villains to take over the parts of the Scottish tyrant and his queen. On the story level, it becomes clear why *Wyrd Sisters* could not exist without its villains the Duke and Duchess Felmet. The story begins with their murdering King Verence to gain control over his kingdom, and the plot of *Wyrd Sisters* tells the reader of the consequences. Furthermore, these two characters provide Terry Pratchett with an opportunity to experiment and play with Shakespeare’s figures by taking their chief characteristics, interchanging them and blending them together, in order to create his own Discworld villains.

4.1 Duke Felmet

The duke put those who met him in mind of some sort of lizard, possibly the type that lives on volcanic islands, moves once a day, has a vestigial third eye and blinks on a monthly basis. (*Wyrd Sisters*: 24).

Duke Leonal Felmet and his wife, the Duchess or Lady Felmet, are the villains of *Wyrd Sisters* and are largely based on Shakespeare’s characters Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Like his model Macbeth, Duke Felmet stabs his cousin, King Verence of Lancre, to death in order to gain the throne of the small mountain kingdom. Yet, although they show several similarities, there are numerous remarkable differences.

Pratchett’s Duke Felmet is not simply a copy of Macbeth. His actions and his behaviour resemble those of Shakespeare’s figure up to the Ghost Scene (III.4). Until then, Macbeth is filled with doubts and fears, shies back from the idea of killing Duncan, suffers under the burden of his bad conscience and even wishes for death: “MACBETH [...] these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead, / Whom we to gain our peace have sent to peace!” (*Macbeth* III.2. 20-22).

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105 See Appendix p. 102, paragraph 3.2.
106 “MACBETH If we should fail?” (*Macbeth* I.7.59).
Duke Felmet harbours such sentiments throughout all of Pratchett’s novels. Unlike Macbeth, who drastically changes after the Ghost Scene, Felmet’s behaviour and madness is further developed into the manic depressive direction and begins to resemble that of Lady Macbeth after the same scene. Up to Act III, Scene 4, she is an ambitious, resolute and hard woman who puts her energies into helping her husband to the throne and keeping him there. After the fateful scene, she is shown to the audience as a broken, haunted woman who finally ends her own life after suffering from nightmares, sleepwalking and other “fancies”\(^\text{107}\). Terry Pratchett weaved this change and her new character into that of his Duke Felmet.

Both murderers are helped along by their wives, whose ambitions often appear much greater than those of their husbands, especially in Lady Felmet’s case. She virtually bullies her husband into committing the murder and has her ways most of the time. Their relationship and marriage is based on the Duke’s fascination for power, of which the Duchess seems to be a personification. In *Wyrd Sisters* the Duke himself muses about how he would still be a local lord if it had not been for her ambitions.

The duke is an intelligent and hard man, although many people, in particular his wife, would think him weak\(^\text{108}\). His way of dealing with the people of Lancre – he raises taxes and burns down cottages, with the inhabitants imprisoned inside them - marks him as a cruel man, yet he is neither a warrior like Macbeth, nor does he share his bloodlust. On the contrary: when the Fool offers him a different path by teaching him the power of words, the duke gladly takes the chance and hopes that a play written especially for him would establish him in people’s minds as a good ruler.

Inwardly, the duke is a ticking time bomb. Inside his mind, paranoia is mixed together with a general nervousness, an obsession with imagined blood stains on his hands and another obsession circling around the covering up of his crime, constant pressure from a bad conscience, lack of sleep and the everlasting nagging and bullying of his wife.

> The man was clearly mad, but at the heart of his madness was a dreadful cold sanity, a core of pure interstellar ice in the centre of the furnace. She [Granny]’d thought him weak under a thin shell of strength, but it went a lot further than that. Somewhere deep inside his mind, somewhere beyond the event horizon of rationality, the sheer pressure of insanity had hammered his madness into something harder than diamond. *(Wyrd Sisters: 154).*

\(^{107}\) *Macbeth* V.3. 40-41: “DOCTOR As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies / that keep her from her rest.”

\(^{108}\) “Weak! He was the worst of them, no courage in him to be as bad as he knew he was, inside.” *(Wyrd Sisters: 326).*
The duke’s paranoia mainly involves three things: He is convinced that the murder was witnessed by somebody, but has no idea who this person might be: “‘You lie! There were no witnesses. [...]! I heard someone in the dark, but there was no-one there! There couldn’t have been anyone seeing anything!’ screamed the duke.” (Wyrd Sisters: 143). Lady Felmet, though, believes that it is only his imagination.

His second fear concerns the witches. He blames them for whatever trouble there is in the kingdom and upon meeting one witch, Nanny Ogg, in the castle, has her arrested on the accusation of having come to poison him. In this he resembles James I of England, who himself is said to have been highly paranoid about witches, believing that they were plotting to kill him. In one scene, the duke quotes passages from some ‘learned’ books that he had read in order to inform himself about witches; these writings indicate a relationship to historical essays on witches like James I’s own Demonologie. Finally, he vaguely feels the awakened land of Lancre and the ghost of Verence. Being unable to explain these vague sensations, he accuses even the trees of whispering malevolent rumours about him. Duke Felmet hates the kingdom of Lancre. In his mind, it is hardly worth the effort, being small, constantly cold and damp, and inhabited by people whose ways he cannot understand.

Besides his fears, he develops two obsessions throughout the novel, both being directly related to the murder of Verence. The first of these obsessions reflects his personal tragedy and the dramatic irony as it is told in Wyrd Sisters: For the people of Lancre, regicide is a perfectly natural cause of death for a king, it is almost traditional. Thus, when the old king is stabbed by Duke Felmet, they simply accept it, as would people in real life accept a

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110 “Gods, he hated the kingdom. It was so small, [...] and nearly all of it was cruel mountains with ice-green slopes and knife-edge crests, or dense huddled forests. A kingdom like that shouldn’t be any trouble. What he couldn’t quite fathom was this feeling that it had depth. It seemed to contain far too much geography.” (Wyrd Sisters: 72).
president’s death resulting from a heart attack. Being unaware of this general consensus, however, the Felmets are utterly convinced that they would have to do everything possible to cover up the murder.

'I didn’t do it, you know,’ said the duke, quickly. ‘He slipped and fell. That was it. Slipped and fell. I wasn’t even there. He attacked me. It was self-defence. That’s it. He slipped and fell on his own dagger in self-defence.’ His voice fell to a mumble. ‘I have no recollection of it at this time,’ he murmured. (Wyrd Sisters: 175).

It is given out that Verence died in an accident that involved him falling down a staircase and into his own dagger. Members of his personal bodyguard who are unwilling to swear to this story are killed as well. This is more due to Lady Felmet’s doing, however, than the duke’s. Soon, anyone talking about Felmet having killed Verence is punished with torture and execution, both in which the duchess delights. When the three witches of Lancre become too much of a threat in the Felmets’ eyes, they start a slandering campaign against them which, in the course of the novel, is beginning to actually take effect. The rulers’ final effort is the commissioning of a propaganda play that should convince the people and Duke Felmet himself once and for all of the Felmets’ version of events and thus legitimate their rule.

Duke Felmet’s second obsession is that with imaginary bloodstains on his hands, a theme hinted at throughout both Macbeth and Wyrd Sisters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wyrd Sisters</th>
<th>Macbeth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“He’d tried to wash the blood off his hand. If he could wash the blood off, he told himself, it wouldn’t have happened. He’d scrubbed and scrubbed till he screamed.” (Wyrd Sisters: 45)</td>
<td>“LADY MACBETH […] Go get some water / And wash this filthy witness from your hands.” (Macbeth II.2. 44, 45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He had spent half the night washing his hands.” (Wyrd Sisters: 46)</td>
<td>“LADY MACBETH My hands are of your colour, but I shame / To wear a heart so white.” (Macbeth II.2. 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“MACBETH What hands are here? […] / Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red.” (Macbeth II.2. 57-61)</td>
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111 This notion of Pratchett’s figures is shown in this quote from Wyrd Sisters: 69: “Well, being assassinated is natural causes for a king, said Granny. ‘I don’t see why he’s being so sheepish about it. […]’
“He’d scrubbed and scrubbed, but it seemed to have no effect. Eventually he’d gone down to the dungeons and borrowed one of the torturer’s wire brushes, and scrubbed and scrubbed with that, too. That had no effect, either. It made it worse. The harder he scrubbed, the more blood there was. He was afraid he might go mad …” (Wyrd Sisters: 59).

“LENNOX Under a hand accursed” (Macbeth III.6. 49)

“ANGUS Now does he feel / His secret murders sticking on his hands.” (Macbeth V.2. 17, 18)

“The duke crouched in his seat, his face a panorama of fear. He extended what had once been a finger.” (Wyrd Sisters: 294).

“GENTLEWOMAN It is an accustomed action with her, to seem / thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a / quarter of an hour. LADY MACBETH Yet here's a spot. […] LADY MACBETH Out, damned spot; out, I say! / […] […] Yet who would have thought the / old man to have had so much blood in him? […] LADY MACBETH […] What, will these hands ne’er be clean? […] LADY MACBETH Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perf- / umes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O! […] LADY MACBETH Wash your hands, […]” (Macbeth V.1. 24-26, 30, 33-34, 37, 42-43, 52)

The obsession with blood-stained hands is a good example of how Terry Pratchett plays with the model text, Macbeth. Instead of simply forming his villain completely like Shakespeare’s Macbeth, he blends together characteristics of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in his own figure Felmet, and does the same with the figure of the duchess. This way, Duke Felmet imitates Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking and her washing of her hands in order to rid herself of bloodstains. He combines Macbeth’s fear of being found out with his panic upon seeing Banquo’s ghost, and at the same time breaks down inwardly like Lady Macbeth in the second part of the play, to the extent of trying to commit suicide. Duke Felmet also shows signs of the insomnia that the Macbeth’s are suffering from, which adds to his unstable mind. Every so often, the madness which is building up inside him shows, as does his bad conscience, when he almost tells somebody about the murder or involuntarily gives away details about the crime while trying to defend himself.
'No! I did not do it! It was not like that! You cannot say it was like that! You were not there!' [...]. 'Nor was I,' he giggled. 'I was asleep at the time, you know. I remember it quite well. There was blood on the counterpane, there was blood on the floor, I could not wash off the blood, but these are not proper subjects for the inquiry. I cannot allow the discussion of national security. It was just a dream, and when I awoke, he'd be alive tomorrow. And tomorrow it wouldn't have happened because it was not done. And tomorrow you can say I did not know. And tomorrow you can say I had no recollection. What a noise he made in falling! Enough to wake the dead . . . who would have thought he had so much blood in him? . . .' (Wyrd Sisters: 299, 300).

He shows clear signs of schizophrenia, and Granny Weatherwax diagnoses him to be a manic depressive: “Granny stared at him as he spoke. He's one of these here maniac depressives, she [thought]. Up and down like a woss-name. Kill you one minute and ask you how you're feeling the next.” (Wyrd Sisters: 159).

The paragraph taken from Wyrd Sisters: 299-300, is interesting in a couple of ways. First, on the story level of Wyrd Sisters, Pratchett presents the reader with a defence speech of the mad duke. Within this speech, Felmet gives away so many details about the murder that the attempt of proving himself innocent becomes absurd. Second, the reader is once more led back to the theme of blood and the futile attempt of washing it off. It could also be read as a metaphor for a feeling of guilt that could not be erased from somebody, i.e., Duke Felmet’s and Lady Macbeth’s mind. Third, language from Shakespeare’s Macbeth and Pratchett’s Wyrd Sisters is mixed with phrases from a court of justice and politics. Fourth, the character of Felmet expresses his wish that the past was just a dream and that the murder had never happened, that is, the return to the order which Felmet himself destroyed. The alliterations “and tomorrow” serve as an emphasis and a means of creating a special rhetorical effect.

Finally, the paragraph is full of quotes from and references to Macbeth.

“MACBETH Wake Duncan with thy knocking”
(Macbeth II.2.72)

“MACBETH Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow”
(Macbeth V.5.18)

“LADY MACBETH [...] Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?”
(Macbeth V.1. 33, 34)

What all these quotes have in common, is that they are all referring to a violent death.
Surprisingly enough, the one thing Duke Felmet does not worry about at all, very much like Macbeth, is the return of the true heir of Lancre. Since Tomjon is hardly more than a three year-old toddler at the beginning of *Wyrd Sisters*, the duke is convinced to have enough time to prepare himself for a return. Macbeth, too, sees Duncan’s sons, especially the older Malcolm, as no threat because of a prophecy saying that no man born by a woman could harm him\(^{112}\).

Another thing that differentiates Felmet and Macbeth is their relationship to the witches. While the latter acts according to their prophecies and seeks them out for advice, the former fears and hates them and tries to rid himself of them. The two tyrants also differ in their relationships to their wives. Macbeth apparently loves Lady Macbeth\(^{113}\). After the ghost episode, however, he grows cold and indifferent towards her, commenting on her death only by stating that she would have died anyways at some point\(^{114}\). In comparison, there are hardly any signs of endearments between the Duke and Duchess Felmet. The duke married her because of her powerful ways and ambitions, while she married him because she thought that she could only rule through a husband. Whereas Lady Macbeth supports her husband and tries to help him by making up stories and apologies to the nobles of Scotland about his strange behaviour at the banquet scene, Lady Felmet merely tells her husband to pull himself together whenever his craze is about to overwhelm him, and otherwise bullies and mocks him. In her opinion, he is terribly weak and lacks all courage.

When Duke Felmet finally suffers from a nervous breakdown upon seeing his crimes re-enacted on stage\(^{115}\), he stabs himself with an actor’s dagger, thus committing suicide, comparable to Lady Macbeth, who may have taken her own life, as we learn near the end of the play. This would at least have been the case in one of Shakespeare’s dramas or the real world. In the Discworld novel *Wyrd Sisters*, Felmet is the only one convinced of his suicide.

[T]hen [he] stabbed himself and let the dagger drop from his fingers.
After a few seconds reflection he said, in a voice far nearer the worlds of sanity, 'You can't get me now.'
He turned to Death. 'Will there be a comet?' he said. 'There must be a comet when a prince dies. I'll go and see, shall I?'
(*Wyrd Sisters*: 302, 303).

\(^{112}\) *Macbeth* V.3. 2-7.
\(^{113}\) Indeed, there are many indications for such feelings in the first part of *Macbeth*.
\(^{114}\) “MACBETH She should have died hereafter. / There would have been a time for such a word.” (*Macbeth* V.5.16, 17).
The dagger is faked; the blade is pushed back into the handle upon pressure. In his madness, however, Felmet believes himself to be dead and decides to haunt the castle as a ghost.

BUT I ASSURE YOU, YOU ARE NOT DEAD. TAKE IT FROM ME.
The duke giggled. He had found a sheet from somewhere and had draped it over himself, and was sidling along some of the castle's more deserted corridors. Sometimes he would go 'whoo-oo' in a low voice.
[…].
'I shall jump out on people,' said the duke dreamily. 'I shall rattle my bones all night, I shall perch on the roof and foretell a death in the house—'
[…]. 'And I shall float through walls, and knock on tables, and drip ectoplasm on anyone I don't like. Ha. Ha.'
[…]. 'I shall hover in the twilight world, I shall find some chains to shake, I shall—'
(Wyrd Sisters: 308, 309).

Not even Death can convince him of the falsity of his assumptions, until Felmet really dies soon after.

4.2. Lady Felmet

"'[…]. Strong men change the world,' she said. ‘Strong men and their deeds.'“
(Wyrd Sisters: 172)

Lady Felmet, in comparison to Duke Felmet, is a combination of Lady Macbeth’s ambition and cruelty in the first part of Macbeth, and the tyrant’s later blood-thirst and brutal aggression. While Terry Pratchett incorporated many characteristics of Lady Macbeth into Duke Felmet, his figure of the duchess appears like a female version of Shakespeare’s lead figure Macbeth. Her worldview can be easily summarised as “survival of the strongest”, and the strongest is her. While her husband suffers from paranoia and other nervous conditions, her main trait is her megalomania, which can be regarded as a mental illness as well, although she generally gives the reader a more sane impression than her husband. In her opinion, she is stronger than everybody and all others are weaker and thus afraid of her. Even kindness is no more than another kind of weakness for her. Quotes from Macbeth, such as “What man dare, I dare” (III.4. 98), and “[…]. For mine own good / All causes shall give way” (III.4. 134), describe Lady Felmet just as well as Macbeth.

Unlike Lady Macbeth, who at least in the first part of Macbeth is devoted to her husband and has his glory in mind, she bullies Duke Felmet into taking over the throne to give her a chance
to rule the country through him, true to the motto “behind every great man there’s a great(er) woman.” Lady Macbeth uses her sexuality as an instrument to convince Macbeth to follow her advice and kill King Duncan for the crown. She also offers her own active help, in telling him to leave the preparations to her and by smearing Duncan’s servants with blood and placing the bloodied daggers that were used to stab Duncan next to them. Later, during the banquet scene, she tries hard to make up for Macbeth’s strange behaviour upon seeing Banquo’s ghost, by inventing stories about a mental condition and apologizing to the bewildered nobles. Lady Felmet does convince her hesitant husband as well, but rather by bullying him. In all their conversations there is no hint at any of the loving feelings that the Macbeths seem to share during the first part of the drama\(^\text{116}\). Lady Felmet helps her husband by handing him the murder weapon and by making sure that he never manages to completely admit the crime to anybody.

The door swung open. The duchess filled the doorway. In fact, she was nearly the same shape. 'Leonal!' she barked.

The Fool was fascinated by what happened to the duke's eyes. The mad red flame vanished, was sucked backwards, and was replaced by the hard blue stare he had come to recognise. It didn't mean, he realised, that the duke was any less mad. Even the coldness of his sanity was madness in a way. The duke had a mind that ticked like a clock and, like a clock, it regularly went cuckoo.

\[(Wyrd\text{ Sisters}: 86)\]

When it is clear that Felmet has gone completely mad, she seizes the chance of declaring herself the new ruler of Lancre. All in all, she lacks all of Lady Macbeth’s ‘feminine’ qualities; Pratchett’s bloody-thirsty duchess, with her male ‘qualities’ taken from Macbeth, appears more male than female from the first time the reader encounters her. Even the description of her physical appearance makes a reader think of a woman who is hardly feminine or attractive. This might be an allusion to the fact that in Elizabethan times female roles were always played by male actors, usually boys.

She was a large and impressive woman, who gave people confronting her for the first time the impression that they were seeing a galleon under full sail; the effect was heightened by her unfortunate belief that red velvet rather suited her. However, it didn't set off her complexion. It matched it. \[(Wyrd\text{ Sisters}: 25)\].

\(^{116}\) Macbeth addresses her with terms such as “love” (III.2. 30), “dear wife” (III.2. 37), “dearest chuck” (III.2. 46), and “Sweet remembrancer” (III.4. 36). She tries to counsel him, make him stay calm and tries to protect his reputation among the Scottish nobles in the ghost scene (III.4.).
Whereas Lady Macbeth can, at least in the last part of *Macbeth*, be considered an almost tragic figure due to her sufferings, sleepwalking and sudden death, Lady Felmet is evil through and through. Lady Macbeth has to summon demons and evil spirits to “unsex” her (*Macbeth* I.5. 38-39), to make her cruel enough for the murder of Duncan. Lady Felmet needs no such aids; Pratchett makes it clear from the beginning that she is cruel and hungry for power. Her design actually makes her the only character in *Wyrd Sisters* that appears to have no likeable facets at all. Pratchett made her a character that imposes fear upon the other figures as well as on the reader. Her husband, in comparison, is almost likable in certain paragraphs, especially when he acts completely ridiculous, as in his defence speech on stage or while ‘haunting’ Lancre Castle while believing himself to be a ghost. Also, Lady Felmet is the only figure in *Wyrd Sisters* to whose thoughts the reader is given access only once, towards the end.

In *Macbeth*, attributes such as “quick tempered”, “choleric”, “cruel”, and “bloodthirsty” are normally used to describe the ruthless warrior and tyrant Macbeth, and not Lady Macbeth, who is cruel in her own way, but is later driven to suicide by the pressure of her crimes. Lady Felmet knows no feelings like guilt or fear, and thus does not suffer from any insomnia. With her, Pratchett created a female version of Macbeth that lacks none of his brutality but the conscience and doubt he shows before committing the regicide. Yet, she is fairly intelligent, or at least intelligent enough to agree to her husband’s ‘experiment’ of trying to turn people’s minds to their favour with the help of their propaganda play. When the ‘experiment’ fails in her opinion, she goes back to her usual approach to solving problems: by force. “’You would prefer the duchess’s approach?’ he said. ‘She just thinks they ought to kill everyone. She’s good at that sort of thing.’” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 271). While Duke Felmet’s witch-related paranoia seems to be a comment of Terry Pratchett’s on James I’s fears of witches and his related essays, Lady Felmet appears to be a personification of the actual witch hunts and trials. Her cruelty and readiness to harm other people is shown in her having furnished her own torture chamber. Here she threatens a witch, Nanny Ogg, with immense pains to press a confession from her. Afterwards, the witch should be burned at a stake. This was the fate of many a witch during the reign of James while he was still only James VI of Scotland. In comparison to her husband’s colourful and stereotypical ideas about witchcraft and witches,

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118 See Chapter 2: *Witches Wyrd and Weird.*
the duchess understands the witches much better, as she studied the real women and not, like Duke Felmet, fantastical writings about them.

Like her model Macbeth, suicide is not an option for her; rather she would fight until the very end.

MACBETH I’ll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked.  
(Macbeth V.3. 33).

MACBETH Why should I play the Roman fool, and die  
On my own sword?  
(Macbeth V.10. 1-2).

In her arrogance and megalomania, she even challenges Granny Weatherwax, Pratchett’s most powerful witch, towards the end of the novel. Surprisingly, as can be read in the Appendix p. 124, p. 13.3, she proves able to withstand the old witch’s attack. As a result she flies into such a rage that the only thing finally stopping her is a cauldron that Nanny Ogg knocks on her head. The duchess is taken a prisoner. While the new king is contemplating to have her meet Macbeth’s fate, i.e. to have her beheaded, she manages to flee. She finds her end in the forest of Lancre, where the kingdom’s mind has grouped together the most dangerous forest dwelling animals to finally rid itself of her.

It was at this point that the track opened out into a clearing that hadn’t been there the day before and wouldn't be there tomorrow, a clearing in which the moonlight glittered off assembled antlers and fangs and serried ranks of glowing eyes. The weak banded together can be pretty despicable, but it dawned on the duchess that an alliance of the strong can be more of an immediate problem. There was total silence for a few seconds, broken only by a faint panting, and then the duchess grinned, raised her knife, and charged the lot of them. The front ranks of the massed creatures opened to let her pass, and then closed in again. Even the rabbits. The kingdom exhaled.  
(Wyrd Sisters: 327).
Summary

Just as *Macbeth* needs its villains to exist, *Wyrd Sisters* needs its villains, as they are the ones who actually begin the story. Also, without their doings and continuing actions, there would be no plot, since they are the antagonists against whom all protagonists are measured and against whom good does prevail in the end.

The Duke and Duchess Felmet are doubtlessly modelled after Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. As with all of Terry Pratchett’s figures, they are not mere copies, though. In order to create his villains, Pratchett took different aspects of Shakespeare’s characters and different phases of their development in the play and put them together in a new combination. Thus, Duke Felmet resembles the insecure Macbeth from the beginning of the drama and the broken-down Lady Macbeth as she is presented to the audience in the later parts of the play. The Duchess Felmet, in turn, incorporates Lady Macbeth’s early ambitions, cruelty and efforts to reach power as well as Macbeth’s later lust for blood and brutality, which makes her appear more male than female, an allusion to the unsexing of Lady Macbeth and the fact that female roles in Elizabethan theatre were played by men or boys.

Duke Felmet’s tragedy is his conviction that the murder must be covered up, as is the case in *Macbeth*. In Pratchett’s *Wyrd Sisters*, however, regicide is a natural way for a king to die and everything would be fine if Duke Felmet did not develop his obsession with legitimizing his rule. Obsession and mental illness are one of the threads running through all of *Wyrd Sisters*, mostly inspired by *Macbeth* and the witch-related beliefs of James I. Throughout the novel, Pratchett’s villains touch on mental problems that reach from the Duchess Felmet’s megalomania to Duke Felmet’s paranoia and obsessions, which finally result in a nervous breakdown and attempted suicide.
Chapter 5: Theatre

There was something here, he thought, that nearly belonged to the gods. Humans had built a world inside the world, which reflected it in pretty much the same way as a drop of water reflects the landscape. And yet . . . and yet . . .

Inside this little world they had taken pains to put all the things you might think they would want to escape from—hatred, fear, tyranny, and so forth. Death was intrigued. They thought they wanted to be taken out of themselves, and every art humans dreamt up took them further in. (Wyrd Sisters 297, 298).

As his novel Wyrd Sisters is a parody of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Terry Pratchett has ample opportunity within it to comment on the theatre in general and Elizabethan theatre in particular, discussing and at times criticizing its plays, players and practices. In particular, the descriptions of, and episodes involving, the theatre company The Vitoller’s Men facilitate and naturalize the inclusion of many historical details on the lives of strolling players and companies, Elizabethan stages and theatre conventions, playwrights and playhouses. Throughout the novel, Pratchett provides insight into the creative processes from the initial writing of play (which allows him to also include explanations of the power of words), through its production and performance, even finding time to briefly include some theatre theory. The first part of this chapter, which is entitled Physical Theatre as it is mostly concerned with the material aspects of theatre, will discuss these comments and historical features.

Two predominant themes in Wyrd Sisters are defamation and propaganda; the use, and possible abuse, of drama for propaganda purposes, and the consequences of such (ab)use, is made clear when a play is used in order to legitimate a usurper. The second part of this chapter, under the heading “Wyrd” Plays, will be concerned with the analysis of the two plays-within-the-novel in Wyrd Sisters, an anonymous play and A Night of Kings.

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5.1 The “Physical” Theatre

5.1.1 Strolling Players

The reader first encounters actors in Wyrd Sisters, in the form of a group of strolling players, led by their manager and star Olwyn Vitoller, who have come to Lancre as a part of their tour. At the end of their stay, they leave with the toddler Tomjon, who has been adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Vitoller on behalf of the witches.

In addition to Olwyn Vitoller, this troupe includes his wife and son, the playwright Hwel, several senior actors, a three-man orchestra, and a few apprentices. They travel in four carts in which they sleep, live, and store their sparse props; they perform on makeshift stages in village squares, barns, and, in one case, a castle’s court yard. Some places they come to, such as Lancre, force them to leave by nightfall, together with all other possible criminals; this distrust has a historical basis.

In The Shakespearean Stage, Andrew Gurr remarks on the latent and sometimes open hostility of people, especially persons of authority, towards travelling players. They felt uncomfortable with the idea of playacting as they considered the act of portraying a character other than the self to be a form of deception. Additionally, it was argued that cross-dressing, which concerned especially the boy actors playing the female roles, was against the Bible. The deeper underlying cause of this “was a more basic fear of pretence and deceit, of people not acting honestly. It put actors into the same category as con men, cheats and thieves.” (Gurr 2009: 82). In this light it might be possible that some English towns had similar rules to those of Pratchett’s fictitious Lancre.

While the players have no parallel whatsoever in Macbeth, a troupe of wandering actors plays a crucial part in Hamlet; upon their arrival at Elsinore Castle120, Prince Hamlet decides to make them his instrument for proving his uncle Claudius’ guilt.

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120 Hamlet II.2, 352-357.
HAMLET I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. [...].

HAMLET [...]. The play’s the thing
Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.

(Hamlet II.2, 566-571; 581, 582).

Nevertheless, the players are more than a means to an end for Hamlet. He admires both them and their art, which emotionally moves him even more than his own father’s death (Hamlet II.2. 527-548). He considers himself a theatre connoisseur, and, although an amateur compared to the professional actors, he gives them directions on how to stage his play (Hamlet III.2. 1-40). Since Hamlet, according to his own words, is only acting the part of the madman (Hamlet I.5. 171-173), he himself can be regarded as a kind of player. For him, however, the borders between acting and being appear to blur more and more throughout the play.

The troupe’s importance for the plot of Wyrd Sisters consists of three points: first, by adopting the boy Tomjon and taking him away from Lancre, they save his life and, train him to become a perfect actor himself. Second, the troupe’s playwright, Hwel composes the propaganda play for Lord Felmet. Third, by deciding to perform said play themselves, they bring Tomjon back to Lancre.

On a different level, Pratchett’s description of the strolling players, their lives, performances, the travelling stage and later their playhouse contains many historical details and references to Shakespeare and his times. Additionally, Pratchett includes some theatre theory and thoughts on acting, the power of words, and theatre itself, all of which will be discussed in this chapter.

Travelling or strolling players have a long tradition in England. From the early fifteenth century onwards we can speak of organized companies consisting of professional players who were usually working under the patronage of a wealthy benefactor. These groups travelled across the country in horse drawn carts and represented the first form of professional theatre, as there were no playhouses at the time. Upon their arrival in a new town they would first attend the mayor. Usually, as a sign of respect for their patron, he would have them stage the
Like Pratchett’s “Vitoller’s Men”, who employ a three-man orchestra, Shakespearean players were often accompanied by professional musicians, or the musical talents of actors were taken advantage of. The importance of music and the necessity of either multi-talented performers or additional musicians is apparent in many plays in which characters would for music at some point\textsuperscript{121}.

Shakespeare’s company worked as a collective, that is the actors and other employees were shareholders of the company, paying and putting in money equally. In contrast, Pratchett’s Players have more in common with a model that became common during the Restoration. Then, companies were led by so-called “actor-managers”\textsuperscript{122}, who, on the one hand, appointed themselves the best roles, but on the other hand, were solely responsible for the business and the payments of their colleagues. Such an “actor-manager” is Olwyn Vitoller in \textit{Wyrd Sisters}, the alleged star of his group and their leader. At the end of the novel, the succession of his adopted son Tomjon as the company’s chief is foreshadowed. Pratchett’s use of an actor-manager and his successor can thus be read as an allusion to the theme of kings and heirs in \textit{Wyrd Sisters} and Shakespeare’s tragedies. Olwyn Vitoller is the king of his theatre group, and Tomjon the prince who one day will inherit his father’s “throne”; instead of his biological father’s kingdom Lancre, he reigns over the players, thus fulfilling a misinterpreted destiny.

In \textit{Wyrd Sisters}, p. 237, Olwyn Vitoller describes the strolling players’ routine: “‘[…] life out on the road, giving two performances a day to a bunch of farmers and going round with a hat afterwards.’” Generally, Pratchett draws a picture of a difficult life consisting of constant travelling, hard work, and ruined health. This stark and hardly romantic depiction is softened by the players’ feeling of solidarity and the spirit of the theatre, as one puts it: ”’Remember the old days? All we had was a few planks and a bit of painted sacking. But we had a lot of spirit. […]’” (\textit{Wyrd Sisters}: 237). Whether life was any easier for the real travelling companies can only be guessed, but it is unlikely.

\textsuperscript{121} For example in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} V.1.26-30.
\textsuperscript{122} Greenblatt (2009b: 40).
**The strolling players’ stage**

The theatre was no more than some lengths of painted sacking, a plank stage laid over a few barrels, and half a dozen benches set out in the village square. But at the same time it had also managed to become The Castle, Another Part of the Castle, The Same Part A Little Later, The Battlefield and now it was A Road Outside the City. *(Wyrd Sisters: 37).*

The stages of both Pratchett’s strolling players and the real companies of Shakespeare’s time were rather bare. A natural reason for this was the limited amount of props that could be carried in the players’ carts. Also, there was no scenery like in modern theatres; instead, playwrights relied on “word scenery” to depict setting. Whenever the place or the time of a scene was important, the characters would tell the audience in their opening lines at the beginning of the scene. In addition, simple props or costume elements could be used to indicate time of day (e.g. a candle carried to indicate night).

From several passages in *Wyrd Sisters*, it can be deduced that Pratchett’s players used costumes, makeup, light props such as cardboard bushes, fires made of red paper and tin cauldrons. Two plays are performed in the novel, the first at the beginning of the book, the other close to the end, which gives them a frame-like character.

During the first play, the reader is told that the players employed a three-man orchestra as has been indicated earlier. In both instances the actors perform in open-air spaces, once in a village square and the other time in a castle’s courtyard; other performances in barns are mentioned. Nothing is mentioned about wings or dressing rooms during the first performance, but for the second staging in Lancre Castle, a guardroom is occupied by the players as a dressing room. What is perhaps of more interest is the fact that Pratchett’s players performed both during the day and the night, probably using torches for lighting the stage, whereas plays in the Elizabethan and Jacobean era were staged during daytime, at least in the public playhouses and by travelling players.

According to Greenblatt and Gurr, performances during Shakespeare’s time had no intermissions to facilitate scenery changes. A scene ended when the featuring characters left the stage and the actors of the next scene entered, establishing a “word scenery”. Pratchett’s travelling players are unable to take much with them as far as props and the stage are concerned. Gurr confirms that companies left most of their “extras” in their home theatre.
when beginning a tour; the only elements essential for a play were the players themselves, “playbooks” (Gurr 2009: 96) and costumes.

The plays themselves were designed to be playable virtually anywhere, avoiding any need for elaborate stage machinery. In addition to the essentials, Gurr lists possible extra luxuries a company could have at their disposal: a stage platform, basic features such as two entry doors, one trapdoor in the stage floor, a pair of stage pillars, at times a discovery space, and every now and then even a heaven. The equipment of Pratchett’s fictitious players, in comparison, is much simpler – a few props, costumes and a big stage.

Both the real and fictitious companies make use of background or offstage noises, most notably in Wyrd Sisters for emphasising storms. According to Gurr (2009: 98), these noises were produced “within”, that is in the “dressing room or tiring-house behind the stage”, hidden from the eyes of the audience. Pratchett adheres to this hiding of the noises’ source, although the technique employed by his players to produce “thunder” differs from the traditional Elizabethan method. While the stagehands in the English theatres used “lead balls rolling down a tin trough” (ibid.), a simple sheet of tin is bent in Wyrd Sisters, the resulting noise is far from satisfying, however. Other tasks of stagehands included the carrying of props on and off the stage, while the performance was going on around them as there were no intermissions. In Wyrd Sisters, nothing indicates that members of Vitoller’s Men included any working as only stagehands; the assumption can be made that actors not featured in a specific scene took over these tasks.

5.1.2 The Dysk and The Globe – Playhouses

On a patch of slightly higher ground by the river, […], a new building was rising. It was growing even by night, like a mushroom – Hwel could see the cressets burning all along the scaffolding as the hired craftsmen and even some of the players themselves refused to let the mere shade of the sky interrupt their labours. (Wyrd Sisters: 211).

In the third part of the novel Wyrd Sisters, the players settle down in the Discworld’s largest city, Ankh-Morpork. On the shore of the river Ankh, in Morpork, the less fashionable part of the city, they begin to build their own theatre, the first in the city. The project is initiated by Tomjon, with support from Hwel, who is charmed into agreeing to the project by the
“possibilities of backdrops and scenery changes and wings and flies and magnificent engines that could lower gods from the heavens and trapdoors that could raise demons from hell.” (Wyrd Sisters: 212).

The new playhouse’s name is The Dysk, derived from the “Discworld” or, in shortened form, simply the “Disc”. The name was inspired by a remark made by Tomjon in Wyrd Sisters p. 213: “It’s got to be a name that means everything,’ he said. ‘Because there’s everything inside it. The whole world on the stage, do you see?’” Similarly, the Globe had the motto “Totus mundus agit histrionem” (“the whole world is a playhouse”) written above its entrance doors123. A reference to the world being a stage can also be found in Macbeth V.5. 24-26: “MACBETH Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more.” Another quote, from As You Like It (II.7. 139-141) has been paraphrased in Wyrd Sisters p. 213:

JAQUES [...] All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
(As You Like It II.7. 139-141).

The whole world was a stage, to the gods . . .
Presently he began to write.
All the Disc it is but an Theater, he wrote, Aite alle men and wymmen are but Players.
[...].
After a while he crossed this out, and tried: Like unto thee Staje of a Theater ys the World, whereon alle Persons strut as Players.
(Wyrd Sisters: 213).

Pratchett’s players, unlike most acting companies at Shakespeare’s time, have no wealthy patron, which results in financial difficulties as the constructions proceed. Their earnings are only enough to pay for the shell and the stage of the theatre. In order to purchase trapdoor mechanisms, machines for descending from the heavens, a big turntable, wind fans, wave machines and whatever else the playwright Hwel desires, Vitoller has to go into debt to a credit shark. Thus, when Duke Felmet’s order for a play and its staging in Lancre promises plenty of silver and patronage, Vitoller persuades Hwel to writing it and Tomjon offers to perform in it.124

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124 For further details see Appendix p. 116, paragraph 10.28.
The playhouse is not finished during the novel, whose focus shifts to a new group of itinerant players in the last quarter of the novel, consisting of Hwel, Tomjon, and a couple of apprentices who travel to Lancre to stage Felmet’s play. From the scarce details Pratchett provides about the theatre, it can be imagined to be an indoor theatre with seats only, modelled more on so-called “picture frame” stages, than Elizabethan public theatres, such as the Globe. The installation of all the stage machinery that was mentioned earlier would support this idea, as such machinery, except for the heavens and trapdoors, was not employed in the Elizabethan era. As Pratchett in his Discworld series does not adhere to any single period of time but often mixes together elements from different eras, such a stage built by a company of players, who generally show a more Elizabethan influence, is natural within the world of the story rather than simply an anachronism. The description of the theatre is a means of showing the development of the players in a much smaller timeframe (fifteen years) than would have been the case, i.e., from Shakespearean strolling players to a troupe that seems to fit better into the Restoration era.

In England, the first permanent public theatres were both situated in London: the Red Lion, first-mentioned in 1567, and James Burbage’s The Theatre built in 1576. The open-air amphitheatre The Globe was built in 1599, while the company was still the “Lord Chamberlain’s Men”, in a suburb of Southwark by the Thames. Since the Lord Mayor and the aldermen of London harboured strong anti-theatrical sentiments, theatres were usually built in the suburbs of London or in so-called “liberties”. According to Stephen Greenblatt (2009b: 37), “[a] liberty was a piece of land within the City of London itself that was not directly subject to the authority of the lord mayor.” One of these liberties was the “Blackfriar” neighbourhood in which, in 1608, Shakespeare’s company, by this time the “King’s Men”, built their private indoor playhouse. In later years the Globe was used mostly during the summer, whereas the company retired to their theatre in the Blackfriar’s area for the winter months.

Performances in these new open-air theatres, which allowed far greater crowds than closed halls, were held during the afternoon in order to take advantage of natural light; the necessary correlative disadvantage was a dependency on fair weather. For the inhabitants of London, entering a building and paying a fee to watch professional actors performing on stage was a new experience, and one that the authorities were predominantly sceptical towards. Neither Greenblatt nor Gurr know anything about possible sentiments of players against a stationary
playhouse, but perhaps one or the other would have shared Olwyn Vitoller’s sentiments in *Wyrd Sisters* p. 212: “‘It’s against nature,’ Vitoller had complained, leaning on his stick. ‘Capturing the spirit of the theatre, putting it into a cage. It’ll kill it.’”. In reality, the public playhouses certainly did not kill the spirit of the theatre; on the contrary, some of the companies and shareholders involved became quite wealthy. In *Wyrd Sisters*, this economical aspect is left aside, as the focus of the story shifts away from the newly built theatre, without foreshadowing whether it will be a success or a failure.

For the building of the Globe, old material from a former playhouse, the Theatre, was reused. According to Gurr (2009: 84-85), the Globe was a polygonal structure divided into twenty segments, measuring almost 30.48 meters (100 feet) in outside diameter. Three levels of galleries that rose 9.14 meters (30 feet) high encircled an open “yard” and were equipped with wooden benches and, in the more expensive sections, cushions. The stage reached out into the yard and was surrounded on three sides by the audience, half of which were standing. Thus, the actors were right in the middle of the crowd, and slightly above it¹²⁵.

The stage was a great square platform as much as 40 feet¹²⁶ wide. It had over it a canopied roof, or “heavens,” to protect the players and their expensive costumes from rain. This canopy was held up by two pillars rising through the stage. The stage platform was about five feet¹²⁷ high […], so that he eyes of the audience in the yard were at the level of the players’ feet. At the back of the stage, a wall – the *frons scenae* – stretched across the front of the players’ tiring house, the attiring or dressing room. It had a door on each flank and a wider curtained space in the center, which was used for mayor entrances and occasionally for set-piece scenes. Above these entry doors was a gallery or balcony, most of which was partitioned into rooms for the wealthiest spectators. A central room “above” was sometimes used in staging: […]. (Gurr 2009: 85).

While slight shifts towards more stage elements were beginning to become noticeable, setting in the new theatres continued to function much as it had in the travelling stages described above: word scenery predominated, with the assistance of a few key props or costume elements.

Sometime after 1608, the King’s Men hired a group of professional Blackfriar musicians. From then on, the central room in the gallery was curtained off and used as a music room during performances. If there was need for it, however, the room could still be used as an “above”. The most important mechanical features of the stage were the “heavens” from

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¹²⁵ The people’s heads were about at height with the actors’ feet.
¹²⁶ Personal note: 12.19 meters.
¹²⁷ Personal note: 1.52 meters.
which gods could descend to “Earth”, that is, the stage, with the help of a simple machine, and the trapdoor in the stage, which symbolized a door to “hell” from which demons ascended to the human realm.

Sound effects were produced backstage by stagehands and were much like those used during the time when the companies were still touring the country. Drums and trumpets, for instance, were used during battle scenes, together with broadswords, so-called “foxes”, that were banged against shields, or “targets”, to accentuate swordfights. Apart from these, fireworks and cannons could be used to enrich the performances.

The Globe was the first theatre owned by the players themselves and made according to their specifications. It burned down in 1613 during a staging of Henry VIII, when a canon misfired. It was rebuilt and remained in use until 1642, when the English parliament shut down all playhouses.

**Props, Costume and Makeup**

“Costume was a vital element in the plays, a mute and instant signifier of the scene.” (Gurr 2009: 89; my emphasis).

Back in the day, costumes functioned primarily as indicators and signifiers, and were the only way to convey information, whereas nowadays it is one way of many. For example: a nightgown together with a nightcap and a candle would tell the audience that the scene took place at night, possibly in the character’s home and that he or she was about to go to bed or had just gotten up. Cloaks and riding boots, as another example, would suggest that the character had just arrived from a journey. Women’s wigs were often used to signify the character’s “state of mind” (Gurr 2009: 90); loose hair would indicate madness, for instance.

Costume and makeup could tell the audience even more. A man with a face painted black in combination with a wig of dark curly wool, marked the character as a “Moor”, a person regarded as barbarian and non-Christian by the majority of English people at the time. Just as a Moor was obviously a Moor, because of his attire, Shakespeare’s witches in Macbeth

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128 For example the means of producing storm noises discussed above.
would have been just as obviously witches due to their costumes, and not simply old women. The most expensive costumes, by far, were the dresses for the female roles.

In the passages concerning the theatre in Wyrd Sisters, the reader learns the following costume tricks: wigs made of flax and straw, and handkerchiefs that were stuffed in the décolleté are used by the boy actors impersonating female roles; ghosts are made to look ethereal by means of chalk dust; Death wears white makeup, a black cloak and plateau shoes; the Evil Duke has an artificial hump attached to his back and assumes a limp.

5.1.3 Theatre “Conventions”

Gentles, leave us dance and sing, and wish good health unto the king (Exeunt all, singing falala, etc. Shower of rose petals. Ringing of bells. Gods descend from heaven, demons rise from hell, much ado with turntable, etc.) The End.
(Wyrd Sisters p. 245).

As has been stated earlier, music was often a vital part of a theatre performance, and many plays, including Shakespeare’s, seem to have included a dance in the end129, as does the “play” in Terry Pratchett’s novel Wyrd Sisters.

A theatrical convention of a different kind was the use of boy actors for female roles, as women were barred from acting on a stage. These boys were usually referred to as “apprentices” who were provided with housing and food by the leading actors. This particular rule has been taken up by Pratchett, whose three “Witches” in Duke Felmet’s play are impersonated by three junior apprentices. In Wyrd Sisters, the young witch Magrat tries to explain this convention to her older colleague Granny Weatherwax, a woman with very strict views on proper behaviour, who struggles to come to terms with the theatre and its rules. Boy actors, and cross-dressing in general, were a constant thorn in the flesh of Elizabethan authorities who feared that “theatrical transvestism excited illicit sexual desires, both heterosexual and homosexual” (Greenblatt 2009b: 37).

Two other conventions in plays are the Prologue, whose function it is to introduce the audience to the background of the story they are about to witness and give a short overview of the plot, and the Epilogue, which rounds up and summarises the play at its end.

129 For example in A Midsummer Night’s Dream V.2. 21-30.
Surprisingly, neither appear to be very common in Shakespeare’s works. In Wyrd Sisters, a figure called the Prologue addresses the audience at the beginning of Duke Felmet’s play:

“‘Pray, gentles all, list to our tale...’
‘What’s this?’ hissed Granny. ‘Who’s the fellow in the tights?’
‘He’s the Prologue,’ said Nanny. ‘You have to have him at the beginning so everyone knows what the play’s about.’”
(Wyrd Sisters p. 276).

5.1.4 The Audience

The little that Terry Pratchett tells the readers of Wyrd Sisters about the theatre company’s audience is relatively congruent with accounts of Elizabethan play-goers. In order to be able to watch a play, people either had to pay an admission fee upfront, or were prompted to throw some coins into a hat that passed around after the performance. In Wyrd Sisters, the fee is half a penny; in Shakespeare’s time, visitors paid one penny for a standing space. In the crowd, members of all social classes mingled together, although some of the wealthiest probably came to be seen rather than to see. Bringing food and drinks or buying both from a vendor during the performance were just as common as talking at all times and throwing things at the actors if the play was disliked. Gurr furthermore mentions the problem of sanitary facilities – there were none. Men simply turned to the nearest wall, while women might have carried little pots or bottles under their skirts.

Both the characters of Wyrd Sisters and historical Elizabethans had similar notions regarding women visiting the theatre. It was not forbidden for women to attend performances, but there were certain restrictions. As Gurr (2009: 82-83) explains:

A respectable woman had to make sure she was escorted by a man. He might be a husband or a friend, or her page if she was rich, or her husband’s apprentice if she was a middle class citizen. […] Market women (applewives and fishwives) went to plays in groups. Whores were expected to be there looking for business, especially from the gallants, but they usually had male escorts, too.

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130 The quote continues: “‘Can’t understand a word of it,’ muttered Granny. ‘What’s a gentle, anyway?’ ‘Type of maggot,’ said Nanny. ‘That’s nice, isn’t it? “Hallo maggots, welcome to the show.” Puts people in a nice frame of mind, doesn’t it?”’ (Wyrd Sisters: 276). It is a wonderful example of the duality of Nanny Ogg’s education: at first, there is nothing to criticise about her explanation of the prologue, and yet, in her next sentence, she gets the word “gentle” completely wrong, causing a humorous misunderstanding.
Similarly, Greenblatt (2009b: 36) states: “The theater was […] a place where innocent maids were seduced and respectable matrons corrupted.” In Pratchett’s novel, the young witch Magrat Garlick voices corresponding sentiments: “‘Tis not right, a woman going into such places by herself.’” (Wyrd Sisters: 36). As a result of these restrictions, no woman, no matter to which social class she belonged, went to the theatre alone.

One reason for these precautions might have been the location of the playhouses. In the London suburbs, bear and dog fight arenas, public places of execution, taverns and brothels shared one neighbourhood with the public theatres, which made them a prime hunting ground for thieves and prostitutes. Thus the idea of going there alone might not have appeared too appealing to many women and their male acquaintances.

5.1.5 The Playwright

The second play in Terry Pratchett’s novel Wyrd Sisters bears remarkable similarities on the plot level to some of William Shakespeare’s plays, most notably Macbeth and Richard III. Influences from Hamlet can be found in the drama being a play-within-the-play as is “The Mousetrap” in Hamlet III.2. 217-242. Both plays were (re-)written for an aristocrat’s (i.e., Prince Hamlet’s and Duke Felmet’s) particular purpose and results in a murderer admitting his crime.

Hwel of Vitoller’s Men

The dwarf Hwel is the playwright of Pratchett’s “Vitoller’s Men” and a close friend to their leader Olwyn Vitoller. He has been cast out by his clan, as his tendency for daydreaming was regarded as a danger to himself and everybody else working in the tribe’s mine. After having attended a performance of the strolling players, he approached Vitoller with his first play. Realising the dwarf’s talent, Vitoller took him in. After the adoption of Tomjon, Hwel becomes the boy’s teacher and, in later years, a kind of minder and confidant for the young man.

Note: Among the three examples given, Pratchett’s is the only one voiced by a woman. Interesting enough, her opinion is accepted by her female colleagues, but not necessarily shared, or at least not obviously so. It can be observed in the novel, however, that the witches attend all theatre performances at least in groups of two.
Besides his role as playwright, Hwel, during the journey to Lancre and the performance of Felmet’s play, takes on the tasks of prompter, stage manager, and director. Like Shakespeare, he probably attends all rehearsals, although he is not an actor himself. Apart from a certain fondness for ghosts in his plays, most of Hwel’s dreams circle around fantastical stage equipment and machinery.

Like historic playwrights working for their specific companies, Hwel writes many of his plays considering most of Olwyn Vitoller’s input and wishes, besides working on his own personal projects. As the example of Duke Felmet’s commissioned piece shows, he also writes for money and the patronage of a wealthy aristocrat.

Hwel is of interest for the reader not only in his function as Tomjon’s teacher and friend, but also because his character gives the reader an insight into the creative writing processes, which, although fictitious, likely resembles the struggles of real playwrights:

“KING: Is this a duck knife dagger I see behind beside in front of before me, its beak handle pointing at me my hand?  
1ST MURDERER: I'faith, it is not so. Oh, no it isn’t!  
2ND MURDERER: Thou speakest truth, sire. Oh, yes it is!”  
(Wyrd Sisters: 243).

In Hwel’s parts, intertextual references are most densely conglomerated in relatively short passages, many of them referring to works by William Shakespeare and Andrew Lloyd Webber. It is in these passages that Pratchett’s idea of “particles of inspiration”, as explained in Chapter 1, is best shown. The mind of Pratchett’s playwright is highly receptive to these particles, which is offered as an explanation to the reader of Wyrd Sisters for the many parallels to Shakespeare’s plays:

Particles of raw inspiration sleet through the universe all the time. Every once in a while one of them hits a receptive mind, [...]. But most of them miss. Most people go through their lives without being hit by even one. 
Some people are even more unfortunate. They get them all. 
Such a one was Hwel. Enough inspirations to equip a complete history of the performing arts poured continuously into a small heavy skull […].
[...] 
Hwel stared at it for a moment, alone in a world that consisted of him, the next blank page and the shouting, clamouring voices that haunted his dreams. 
He began to write. 
[...]. The dwarf stuck out his tongue as he piloted the errant quill across the ink-speckled page. He'd found room for the star-crossed lovers, the comic gravediggers and the hunchback king. It was the cats and the roller skates that were currently giving him trouble . . .
He'd sorted out the falling chandelier, and found a place for a villain who wore a mask to conceal his disfigurement, and he'd rewritten one of the funny bits to allow for the fact that the hero had been born in a handbag. It was the clowns who were giving him trouble again. They kept changing every time he thought about them.

(Wyrd Sisters: 77, 78, 209).

5.2 “Wyrd” Plays

5.2.1 Seeing is Believing

Since performances in Elizabethan public theatres were held in the open air and daylight, the audience was at all times aware that they were in a theatre, i.e., in a place of illusions. This awareness of time and place became especially apparent when the play, or the actors, told the spectators that it was, for instance, night time and wintry cold, while the people were actually standing under the hot summer sun. The audience had to be willing and able to accept what they were told as a momentary truth; this acceptance is referred to as “willing suspension of disbelief”, a term that was coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817. The audience’s ability of imagining and accepting the plays as temporal reality made the people quite “receptive to extratheatrical tricks” (Gurr 2009: 80).

Such “extratheatrical tricks” included boys playing female roles and being accepted as women as long as they were onstage, and imagining a scene to be taking place at night, or in a foreign country. A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a play full of such devices that demand a strong effort towards acceptance from its spectators. They have to take a night-time dream as temporary truth, and willingly share the pretence of humans being elves and becoming “invisible” on stage.

Sharing the theatrical pretending and suspending of one’s disbelief is of major importance in Wyrd Sisters, where it almost leads to a catastrophe. During the first play at the beginning of the novel, Magrat Garlick unsuccessfully tries to explain the concept of theatre and make-

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believe to a resistant Granny Weatherwax who, by deciding to expose what she regards as deception, takes on a role in the drama, as the audience believes that her interference with the play’s plot is a part of the performance. On Pratchett’s Discworld, seeing is not only believing but believing is seeing; thus, if a spectator believes that an old witch is part of a dramatic performance that originally did not feature a witch, it becomes the truth.

5.2.1 The Power of Words

In the Discworld novels, magic is one of the driving powers of the fictitious world. When magic spells are uttered, they come true and have real effects. Powerful words are not necessarily wrapped up in a spell – they could be delivered in a play as well. As the Fool explains to his liege lords, reality is made of words, i.e., words are reality. Thus words are something extremely powerful that could even change the world. What the Felmets are more interested in, though, is to change the past. According to the Fool, history is what people remember, for example, stories, legends, and plays. Summarizing, the past is made of facts, but history is a story invented by humans:

‘You tell me history is what people are told?’ said the duchess.
The Fool looked around the throne room and found King Gruneberry the Good (906-967).
‘Was he?’ he said, pointing. ‘Who knows, now? What was he good at? But he will be Gruneberry the Good until the end of the world.’
(Wyrd Sisters: 174, 175).

There are many examples in history of such transfigured personages. A famous negatively transfigured character is Richard III of England, who is regarded by many as a bloodthirsty tyrant, among other things because of an identically named play by Shakespeare. Richard the Lionheart went through the exact opposite process and became a glorified folk hero, although he was really a rather colourless king who spent more time on crusades than in his kingdom. As for two other legendary heroes, King Arthur and Robin Hood, their very existence is hotly debated. There are chances that at least Hood has been modelled on a historical person, but his wondrous deeds outshine any real ones this person might ever have done. Both are examples of how, mostly, fictional figures, due to the numerous stories and legends that are told about them, can become a part of a people’s actual history and culture.
The Felmets want people to believe and remember their version of how Duke Felmet usurped the throne of Lancre. To this end they have already begun a smear campaign against the local witches, whom they consider their strongest opponents. Seeing that their efforts are not entirely fruitless, they commence by putting the Fool’s teaching to good use by ordering a propaganda play to teach the Lancre people the “true” history.

In Pratchett’s novels, believing can easily become seeing: if enough people believe something, then it becomes real. Earlier, “wilful suspension of disbelief” was mentioned, that is, the acceptance of pretence as momentary truth. The power of the words combined with the magic of the theatre combined is so strong in *Wyrd Sisters* that the borders between play and “reality” begin to blur. The audience believes so strongly in the story they are told that these words threaten to change reality as it is portrayed in *Wyrd Sisters*: they threaten to change the past and invent a new history according to the guidelines of Duke Felmet, legitimizing him and pushing the witches into role of the scapegoats and evil hags: “This was real. This was more real even than reality. This was history. It might not be true, but that had nothing to do with it.” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 282). In order to prevent these threatened changes from becoming real, the three witches decide to make use of a peculiarity of the play: from the very beginning of its existence both playwright and actors had the impression that the play was constantly trying to rewrite itself. The witches put a charm on the actors during the performance to make them forget the wrong words, so that Truth could fill the gaps and thus be told to the audience.

‘Why don't we just change the words?’ said Magrat. ‘When they come back on stage we could just put the ’fluence on them so they forget what they're saying, and give them some new words.’
‘I suppose you're an expert at theatre words?’ said Granny sarcastically. ‘They'd have to be the proper sort, otherwise people would suspect.’
‘Shouldn't be too difficult,’ said Nanny Ogg dismissively. 'I've been studyin' it. You go tumpty-tumpty-tumpty-tumpty.’ (*Wyrd Sisters*: 295).

Granny Weatherwax stood up. She advanced to the edge of the stage. The audience held its breath. […]
‘Ghosts of the mind and all device away, I bid the Truth to have—’ she hesitated – ‘its tumpty-tumpty day.’
Tomjon felt the chill engulf him. The others, too, jolted into life. Up from out of the depths of their blank minds new words rushed, words red with blood and revenge, words that had echoed among the castle's stones, words stored in silicon, words that would have themselves heard, words that gripped their mouths so tightly that an attempt not to say them would result in a broken jaw. (*Wyrd Sisters*: 296).
Again the words are magic, though this time delivered in the form of a charm which instantly takes effects, opening the path for Truth.

In *Wyrd Sisters*, powerful words are directed towards the witches in an attempt to discredit them and weaken their social position. This is not a new concept and has been used numerous times throughout history and, unfortunately, often successfully. The example nearest to the topic of this thesis is that of witch hunts and trials. Mostly women, but also some men, became the victims of accusations and slander. Subsequently they were hunted down by “witch hunters” and brought to trials that not many survived. The situation as it is recounted in *Wyrd Sisters* does not worsen to this extent, due to the intervention of the witches, but it is easy to follow the line of thought of what would have happened otherwise.

At first the witches are confronted with malevolent rumours accusing them of causing trouble for the normal people around them. These rumours are started by the Felmets and are helped along by an underlying dislike for witches. Next, they are publicly humiliated by Duke Felmet and one of them, Granny Weatherwax, is almost run over by a cart and killed. These are only individual events, but it is possible to estimate where they could lead, especially if people had believed what Felmet’s play told them about the witches. Witch hunts and trials might have soon followed the final curtain.

To conclude: the power of words should not be underestimated; they can change a worldview very quickly and irrevocably. As Pratchett suggests, the power of words used by the wrong people and for the wrong purposes can have very dire consequences.

### 5.2.2 The “Untitled” Play

The untitled play is performed in Lancre near the beginning of *Wyrd Sisters*. The only thing that can be said about the plot is that it is about the murder of a king.

On the surface, the play introduces the travelling players, who later on provide Pratchett with means for commenting on acting companies, playhouses and theatre in various ways, as has been discussed in the first part of this chapter. On a different level, it provides the platform for Granny Weatherwax’s and Nanny Ogg’s first experience with the phenomenon ‘theatre’. On a third level, the scene brings up the concept of “wilful suspension of disbelief”, or shared
pretence, and shows the witches’ individual reactions to it. Finally, it foreshadows the more
important play at the end of Wyrd Sisters in which all three witches consciously become part
of the performance.

The three witches take different approaches to the theatre. Magrat Garlick, the best educated
of the three, has been exposed to theatre on earlier occasions and tries to explain theatre and
its peculiarities to her colleagues. Among the two older witches, Nanny Ogg begins to
understand the concept of play acting, when she states “[it’s] all just pretendin’” (Wyrd
Sisters: 38). It is about pretending, and equally about the audience taking part in and accepting
that pretence, acknowledging it as reality for the length of the performance.

Granny Weatherwax, however, seems completely unable to understand the concept of theatre.
She constantly interrupts the ongoing performance with her comments and upsets the actors.
The audience is soon convinced that her interjections and interference are part of the play.
This belief turns the “real” person Granny Weatherwax into a fictional character of the play. It
could also be said that this situation is the result of her inability to accept dramatic pretending
as temporary truth. The whole process happens without her being aware of it; she is making
herself a part of the play unconsciously. In the later play, which is foreshadowed here, the
witches will do the same consciously and deliberately.

‘What’s going on now?’ she said. ‘Why’re all them kings and people up there?’
It’s a banquet, see,’ said Nanny Ogg authoritatively. ‘Because of the dead king, him in the
boots, […] , and everyone's […] wondering who killed him.’
‘Are they?’ said Granny, grimly. She cast her eyes along the cast, looking for the
murderer.

She was making up her mind.
Then she stood up.
Her black shawl billowed around her like the wings of an avenging angel, come to rid the
world of all that was foolishness and pretence and artifice and sham. She seemed
somehow a lot bigger than normal. She pointed an angry finger at the guilty party.
‘He done it!’ she shouted triumphantly. ‘We all seed im! He done it with a dagger!’

The audience filed out, contented. It had been a good play on the whole, they decided,
although not very easy to follow. But it had been a jolly good laugh when all the kings
had run off, and the woman in black had jumped up and did all the shouting. That alone
had been worth the ha'penny admission.
(Wyrd Sisters: 40, 41).
5.2.3 *A Night of Kings* – Felmet’s Drama

*A Night of Kings* is a play commissioned by Duke Felmet and written by the playwright Hwel. The assignment is finally given to the Vitoller’s Men[^133]. The company accepts somewhat reluctantly, but is convinced by a large sum of money and the prospect of much needed patronage.

'I expect,' said Tomjon. 'It sounded interesting, the way he told it. Wicked king ruling with the help of evil witches. Storms. Ghastly forests. True Heir to Throne in Life-and-Death Struggle. Flash of Dagger. Screams, alarums. Evil king dies. Good triumphs. Bells ring out.'

(*Wyrd Sisters*: 235, 236).

*A Night of Kings* is a play-within-the-play, or in this case, a play-within-the-novel. It bears a resemblance to “The Mousetrap” in *Hamlet* (III.2. 217-242), although its purpose is initially a different one. Instead of exposing an illegitimate ruler as the murderer of his predecessor, it is supposed to legitimize Duke Felmet as new king of Lancre and represent the murder of former King Verence as an act of freeing the kingdom from tyranny. The outcome, however, is much like Claudius’s reactions to the plot of “The Mousetrap”. In both instances, the murderer supposedly reveals himself[^134]. Duke Felmet, upon suffering a nervous breakdown caused by the re-enactment of the murder on stage, delivers a full confession in front of the actors, the witches and the audience.

There is no play-within-the-play in *Macbeth*, yet there are remarkable parallels between the two dramas due to the fact that *A Night of Kings* is based on *Macbeth* and even quoting Shakespeare’s tragedy at times. The plot is simple: an evil king, “Verence”, who is portrayed in a fashion that is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Richard III (limping and hunchbacked), is

[^133]: For more information see Appendix p. 116, paragraph 10.28.
[^134]: With Claudius, there is still room for doubt until his praying scene a short while later.
oppressing the kingdom with the help of three evil hags. A good duke, “Felmet,” and his wife are coming to rescue the suffering people, and in a grand duel scene at the end of the play, the bad king is killed by the good duke. Order is re-established and good has won.

The story of *Macbeth* is very similar: a Thane rises to power by committing regicide after having heard the prophecy of three evil witches, who will lead him further towards damnation in the course of the play. He exploits his kingdom and his people, committing terrible crimes, until the former king’s son and rightful heir comes back to Scotland, together with a group of righteous nobles to reclaim the throne. The tyrant is killed in a final duel by one of these aristocrats and his head is carried around the stage as a sign of victory.

There are two instances in the play that resemble scenes from *Macbeth* the most – the “witches” scenes and the “murder” or “dagger” scene. The first of two “witches” scenes features only the “evil witches”, and Pratchett provides the reader with a few bits and pieces of their lines, sometimes recounted by other characters:

**Wyrd Sisters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wyrd Sisters</th>
<th>Comparable to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“—I have smother'd many a babe—” (Wyrd Sisters: 280).</td>
<td>LADY MACBETH […] I have given suck, and know / How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me/ I would […] / have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn (<em>Macbeth</em> I.7. 54-58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I never shipwrecked anybody!’ she said. ‘They just said they shipwreck people! I never did!’” (Wyrd Sisters: 280, 281).</td>
<td>FIRST WITCH Here I have a pilot’s thumb, / Wrecked as homeward he did come. (<em>Macbeth</em> I.3. 26, 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’Did you hear that?’ she said. ‘One of ’em said we put babbies in the cauldron! (Wyrd Sisters: 283).</td>
<td>THIRD WITCH Finger of birth-strangled babe / Ditch-delivered by a drab. (<em>Macbeth</em> IV.1. 30, 31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ditch-delivered by a drabe&quot;, they said. (ibid.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second time the “witches” are seen on stage, they only sit in the background, looking occult and dark.

"At last! What are you three playing at? We've been looking for you everywhere!"
The witches turned to see an irate dwarf trying to loom over them.
"Us?" said Magrat. "But we're not in—"
"Oh yes you are, remember, we put it in last week. Act Two, Downstage, around the cauldron. You haven't got to say anything. You're symbolising occult forces at work. [...]"
(Wyrd Sisters: 291).

Depending on the performance of Macbeth, similar stage directions might have been given to Shakespeare’s witches.

The dagger scene again resembles scenes from Macbeth; in Wyrd Sisters, it is performed after the witches’ spell that allows Truth to take over the actors and force them to exactly re-enact the murder of King Verence by Duke Felmet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wyrd Sisters</th>
<th>Comparable to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Do you fear him now?' said Gumridge. 'And he so mazed with drink? Take his dagger, husband – you are a blade's width from the kingdom.'</td>
<td>MACBETH. If we should fail?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I dare not,' Wimsloe said, trying to look in astonishment at his own lips.</td>
<td>LADY MACBETH. We fail! / But screw your courage to the sticking-place / And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep— / [...] / What cannot you and I perform upon / Th’ unguarded Duncan? What not put upon / His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt / Of our great quell? / [...]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Who will know?' Gumridge waved a hand towards the audience. He'd never act so well again. 'See, there is only eyeless night. Take the dagger now, take the kingdom tomorrow. Have a stab at it, man.'</td>
<td>LADY MACBETH. Who dares receive it other, / As we shall make our griefs and clamor roar / Upon his death?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimsloe's hand shook.</td>
<td>(Macbeth I.7. 59-79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'I have it, wife,' he said. 'Is this a dagger I see before me?'</td>
<td>MACBETH. Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Of course it's a bloody dagger. Come on, do it now. The weak deserve no mercy. We'll say he fell down the stairs.'</td>
<td>(Macbeth II.1. 33, 34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A troublesome play

But all the right ingredients were there, weren't they? Tradition was full of people giving evil rulers a well-justified seeing to. Witches were always a draw. The apparition of Death was particularly good, with some lovely lines. Mix them all together . . . and they seemed to cancel out, become a mere humdrum way of filling the stage for a couple of hours.
(Wyrd Sisters: 255).

A Night of Kings turns out to be a rather wayward and almost improvised drama, which is very unusual for a scripted performance. The character Tomjon reflects on this dilemma during the performance:

Hwel had said that everything about the play was fine, except for the play itself. And Tomjon kept thinking that the play itself was trying to force itself into a different shape. […].
This wasn't right. Once a play was written it was, well, written. It shouldn't come alive and start twisting itself around. […]. The play was […] trying to change itself.
(Wyrd Sisters: 286, 287).

What appears to be happening is that the Truth about the events in Lancre is trying to force its way into the play. The actors are forgetting their lines again and again, but it is not possible for the Truth to fill the gaps. This leaves the actors in a very nervous state and makes the whole performance a continuous struggle.

In fruitless attempts to infuse the play with the proper sort of magic, Hwel spends countless hours rearranging the script, even experimenting in a Waiting for Godot-like fashion:

“1ST WITCH: He's late.
(Pause)
2ND WITCH: He said he would come.
(Pause)
3RD WITCH: He said he would come but he hasn't. This is my last newt. I saved it for him. And he hasn't come.”
(Wyrd Sisters: 255).

The Felmets are delighted after having read the script, as it portrays everything the way they want. Now, the last step in achieving their goal of changing history is to stage the play. In Hwel’s opinion, however, the play will go down as a fiasco.
**Blurring the lines**

*A Night of Kings* is a play of involving the transgression of boundaries. The first boundary is the one between the fictitious reality of the play and the reality of the Discworld, as Pratchett describes it in *Wyrd Sisters*. The play’s initial purpose is to change the past by (re-) writing history. Due to their “willing suspension of disbelief” and their conscious acceptance of the “truth” of the play, the audience begins to actually believe what they are told, no matter what they formally knew: King Verence, probably not the best of rulers, but not particularly bad either, will be remembered as a cruel disfigured tyrant; the witches, devoted to helping their fellow people, will be remembered as evil mischief-causing hags; the usurper and murderer Duke Felmet will be remembered as a hero. The play thus begins to affect the audience’s minds and memories, and, for some time, it remains unclear if the results described above can be averted or if this new version of history will be permanent:

Granny was sitting as still as a statue, and almost as cold. The horror of realisation was stealing over her. 'That's us,' she said. 'Round that silly cauldron. That's meant to be us, Gytha.'

[...]

King Verence gripped the edge of his seat; his fingers went through it. Tomjon had strutted on to the stage. 'That's him, isn't it? That's my son?' [...] 'But what is he doing? What is he saying?'

[...]

'I think he's meant to be you,' said Nanny, distantly. 'But I never walked like that! Why's he got a hump on his back? What's happened to his leg?' He listened some more, and added, in horrified tones, 'And I certainly never did *that!* Or that. Why is he saying I did that?'

That's us down there, she thought. Everyone knows who we really are, but the things down there are what they'll remember – three gibbering old baggages in pointy hats. All we've ever done, all we've ever been, won't exist any more.

[...] Whoever wrote this Theatre knew about the uses of magic. Even I believe what's happening, and I know there's no truth in it.


The second boundary is overstepped when the “real” witches Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and Magrat Garlick are mistaken by the playwright and director Hwel for the three actors playing the “Witches”. He orders them to go on stage, which they take to their advantage. They have come up with a plan: if they can make the actors forget the wrong words that Felmet has dictated for them, the truth will be able to come out and turn things around. To achieve this goal, they wilfully become part of the play, blurring the line that separates reality and fiction. Interestingly, it is the almost insane Duke Felmet who gives a
voice to their actions, thus acknowledging them as now belonging to the world of the drama:

"'There they are,' he breathed. 'That's them. What are they doing in my play? Who said they could be in my play?'' (Wyrd Sisters: 294).

After the witches have caused much confusion and changed the course of things drastically (the actors are now re-enacting the true murder of Verence), the reader witnesses an inner transgression, i.e., the passing from relative sanity over to complete madness in Duke Felmet. Having always been paranoid and emotionally unstable, he suffers a nervous breakdown while watching his crime being displayed to all of Lancre, and the thin wall between his sanity and madness collapses.

This causes the next transgression: in his craze, Duke Felmet jumps onto the stage, his furious wife following him in a futile attempt to hold him back. Thus, both of them become part of the play as well, although not as consciously as the witches. While trying to convince everybody, including himself, that what the players say are lies and that he is innocent, Felmet involuntarily gives the people around him all the details about the murder. Finally, he snatches a trick dagger from one of the actors and stabs the Fool, who has finally come forward as a witness of the crime. Upon seeing no blood on the “dead” Fool, Felmet is completely convinced of his own innocence, since where there is no blood there is no crime. Blaming his wife he stabs her too, and afterwards himself. Believing himself dead and thus outside every human jurisdiction, he walks off. The audience, thinking that they have just witnessed the final act of the play, applauds.

'I gave no orders that any such thing should be done,' said the duke calmly. His voice came from a long way off, from wherever his mind was now. The company stared at him wordlessly. [...] He stabbed several of the nearest actors in a dreamy, gentle way, and then held up the blade. 'You see?' he said. 'No blood! It wasn't me.' He looked up at the duchess, towering over him now like a red tsunami over a small fishing village. 'It was her,' he said. 'She did it.' He stabbed her once or twice, on general principles, and then stabbed himself and let the dagger drop from his fingers. After a few seconds reflection he said, in a voice far nearer the worlds of sanity, 'You can't get me now.' He turned to Death. 'Will there be a comet?' he said. 'There must be a comet when a prince dies. I'll go and see, shall I?' He wandered away. The audience broke into applause. (Wyrd Sisters: 302, 303).
The final transgression that has been hinted at in the above paragraph is that of life and death. First, Death himself has come to the performance to claim a soul. He takes over the part of an actor supposed to impersonate the grim reaper and appears onstage. Normally, in the Discworld novels, Death can only be seen by his “clients” and psychically inclined beings such as witches and cats. In the current situation, however, the audience knows that there will be an appearance of “Death” and expects him. The result is that Death, for once, is visible for hundreds of living beings. Afterwards, the ghost of the dead Verence takes possession of his son Tomjon’s living body to personally accuse Felmet. Third and finally, there are the theatrical deaths of the Fool, Duke Felmet, and Lady Felmet. Since the dagger used by Duke Felmet is a trick dagger, nobody actually dies, although there is some confusion at first. The only one who does not realize the deceit is Felmet, who believes himself dead and wanders off.

**Summary**

In his descriptions of the strolling players, Pratchett involves many historical details about players, play-acting and the playhouses. He also offers the reader some insight into the creative writing processes and several thoughts on theatre itself, including the concepts of “wilful suspension of disbelief“ and shared pretence, which are vital for understanding the events of his plays-within-the-novel, especially *A Night of Kings*.

Another major theme is the power of words and what harm can be done if the right or wrong words are used against people. In this part of the novel, the reader enters a serious discussion about the abuse of words, literature and other media to marginalize a group, harm their reputation, humiliate them and press them into a scapegoat position. It also deals with possible results of such scheming, and inspires further thoughts in the reader. It is a critique of the past and of the readiness of people to wilfully believe in negative rumours rather than in the facts they know. Finally, Pratchett plays with transgressions and the blurring of borders, such as the borders between reality and fiction, “real” characters and roles in a play, sanity and madness, and finally life and death.
Conclusion

Within *Wyrd Sisters*, when it is compared to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, several tones can be distinguished, depending on which aspect of the story is being dealt with. The humorous tones are found in scenes that involve parody, which is usually established by a high amount of intertextual references to Shakespeare’s plays. The “traditions“ of Pratchett’s witches are a good example of parody through intertextuality: by quoting and paraphrasing passages from *Macbeth*, but failing to correctly interpret and re-enact them, humorous situations develop. A more serious tone is used, however, in scenes where the witches are acting according to fairy tale models, which are important for the plot of *Wyrd Sisters*. The darkest and most dangerous tones are to be found in Duke Felmet’s propaganda play near the end of the novel, when the play’s distorted portrayal of history threatens to become reality. More thoughtful tones are used during the discussions and comments on theatre and the power of words that the reader encounters throughout *Wyrd Sisters*. An instance of dramatic irony is Duke Felmet’s unawareness of the people’s acceptance of regicide being a natural cause of death in Lancre (ironically, because most of the former kings have been murdered); he believes that he too, like his Shakespearean models Macbeth and Claudius, has to cover-up the murder, which drives him into paranoia and madness.

Apart from parody and humour, criticism is an important characteristic of Pratchett’s *Wyrd Sisters*. By measuring his round, closer to life characters against flatter and more stereotypical figures from Shakespeare—for instance, his living kings in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and the witches in the former—he differentiates his own work and figures. What is interesting in this aspect is that Pratchett did not simply copy Shakespeare’s characters; he rather took their characteristics, arranged them newly and combined them with elements from other sources, such as history, fairy tales, folklore and popular culture. Thus, Pratchett’s witches are a blend of all these elements, most notably Shakespeare’s witches, history and fairy tales; his King Verence involves, besides characteristics shared with Duncan and old Hamlet, influences from historical, stereotypical feudal lords; and the villain Duke Felmet is a mixture of the early Macbeth, later Lady Macbeth (after her breakdown in the second part of Macbeth) and the paranoia of James I of England, while his wife, the duchess, combines elements from the later, blood-thirsty Macbeth, the early, ambitious Lady Macbeth, and cruel inquisitors. What
all the characters analysed in the thesis have in common is their importance for the plot of their respective texts. 

*Wyrd Sisters* is a story of the transgression and blurring of boundaries, such as the boundaries between life and death which are overstepped by Verence’s ghost and Death himself, the boundaries between the “reality“ of Pratchett’s fictitious world and the fiction of Felmet’s play, with “real“ characters becoming part of a play, and the transgression from sanity to madness. Themes common to Pratchett’s novel and Shakespeare’s plays are the disturbance and restoration of order, which in Shakespeare is greatly influenced by the Renaissance concept of the Great Chain of Being, and madness.

In the passages concerning theatre, Pratchett provides the reader with historical details of different aspects of theatre, insights into the creative writing process and thoughts on theatre voiced by his characters. What is probably more important, however, is Pratchett’s discussion of the power of words and the possible consequences when they are (ab-)used in the form of negative rumours and propaganda. In comparison, Shakespeare tacitly contributed to sentiments against “witches“ by depicting them as evil, mischief-causing hags, or at least he did not criticise what happened to accused “witches“ under James I, especially when he was still James VI of Scotland. Pratchett, in *Wyrd Sisters*, seems to actively criticize such propaganda against (minority) groups, as well as the human tendency to naively and readily believe in false rumours rather than in the facts they know. He also hints at, and makes the reader think about, the possible outcome of such practices, by foreshadowing witch-hunts and trials in his fictional Lancre, the way they have occurred in the past. Thus, his Discworld is a parable and mirror of historical events and human behaviour.

To conclude: In Pratchett’s book, although the overall tone is a humorous one and the reader is presented with a happy ending, it is not a mere parody that simply makes fun of the original texts, but has a strong criticising function as well. It should not be forgotten, however, that every adaptation of an original text is also an homage to its author; with *Wyrd Sisters*, Pratchett shapes Shakespeare’s tragedies anew, presenting them to a modern day audience in a humorous way that may awaken or further the readers’ interest in the bard’s work.
Primary Literature:


Secondary Literature:


**Online Sources:**


**Pictures:**


Figure 2: Grynkiewicz, Sarah (2013). *Disc Meets Globe: Shakespearean Reflexions in Terry Pratchett’s Wyrd Sisters*. Graz: Karl-Franzens University. 53.
APPENDIX

Summary of *Wyrd Sisters* by Terry Pratchett

1. On the first few pages, the Discworld is introduced to the reader. Next, the small kingdom of Lancre, the main setting of *Wyrd Sisters*, is described. It is situated somewhere in the so-called Ramtop Mountains that cross almost half of the Discworld and are its major mountain range. What makes this region so special is that high amounts of raw magic, the fuel of the Discworld, are caught between its peaks. As a result, many of the Disc’s most powerful witches and wizards are born in this area, and occult phenomena and portents are the norm for the mountains’ inhabitants.

   1.1 The three witches are introduced: Esmerelda 'Granny' Weatherwax, Gytha 'Nanny' Ogg, and the youngest witch, Magrat Garlik. Together they form a coven of three and this night they are having their first Sabbath, on an otherwise deserted heath.

   1.2 A coach is racing across the countryside, under attack by riders hunting it; the desperate driver aims for the fire of the witches' gathering.

2. King Verence is introduced and within the first sentence it is revealed that he died only instants earlier. The reader learns that he has been murdered by his cousin, Duke Felmet. Death, a figure as real as any human in the Discworld novels, explains to Verence that he will continue his existence as a ghost until he fulfils his destiny. He points out that only three categories of living beings will be able to see him: close relatives, the psychically inclined, such as witches, and cats. At the mention of close relatives, Verence storms off to the nursery of the castle. To his horror, he finds his son gone and observes, through one of the windows, a coach leaving the court at high speed, followed by three riders. An attempt to follow it fails.

3. The coach reaches the witches' gathering and the driver hands a bundle to Granny seconds before he is killed by an arrow. The three riders who have followed him, soldiers, step up, and their captain orders Granny to hand over the bundle, which turns out to be a sleeping toddler wrapped in blankets. Granny refuses and the captain threatens to kill her, but is stabbed to death by one of the two soldiers, who could not bear the wrongness of the situation any longer. The old witch advises him to seek refuge in flight and become a
sailor on the distant sea. Thankful, the man runs off. When the witches turn to the third soldier to demand an explanation, they find that he, too, has gone. An examination of the captain's and the coach driver's corpses reveals that they were both in King Verence's guard, and Magrat finds a crown in the coach.

3.1 Meanwhile, Verence has made the acquaintance of another ghost, who illuminates some of the restrictions of Verence's new existence, most importantly, the rule that ghost are bound to the stones of the place they have been murdered at, which in their case is Lancre Castle. Downcast, Verence formulates his three goals in death: to figure out a way to leave the castle, find his son, and take revenge on Felmet.

3.2 The next morning: Duke and Duchess Felmet are introduced to the reader. They discuss the disappearance of both child and crown. The duke remembers last night's murder and some of its immediate consequences, one of them being the overtaking of the throne by Felmet.

3.3 Another major character has his entry, the so-called Fool: he is the court jester, but a well educated young man who is hiding behind his occupation as behind a mask. The third soldier from the night before arrives at the castle's gate and urgently demands to be led to said Duke Felmet to report on the witches.

4 The witches have retired to Nanny Ogg's cottage and discuss what to do with the child and crown. They agree on the necessity of hiding both, but the question is how, since fate is a very strong power on the Discworld and will inevitably reveal them sooner or later. Magrat mentions a travelling theatre group being in Lancre at the moment, and the three women decide to pay them a visit.

4.1 The witches watch the company's performance. It becomes clear that, unlike Magrat, Granny has no idea about the 'theatre' and, throughout the performance she struggles hard to accept its imaginary reality. Finally, because of her repeated interference with the play, she becomes a part of it in the eyes of the audience.

5 After the performance, the witches go backstage where they meet the leader of the company, Olwyn Vitoller. After some moments of examination, during which the actor manages to highly impress the witches, Granny asks for a private conversation and Vitoller suggests the nearby pub.
In the castle, Felmet questions the castle's chamberlain about witches, due to the report of the soldier. Later, he discusses his findings with his wife who, with her order to “put matters in hand” (Wyrd Sisters: 45), reminds him once more of the murder and especially the blood on his hands which, in his imagination, he cannot wash off.

Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg have followed Mr. Vitoller to the pub, where they meet his wife. After asking them whether or not they have a child of their own, which they deny, the witches convince them to adopt the little boy they have been taking care of since the dreadful night. The couple agrees. When asked about their relationship to the child and his name, the old witches declare themselves his godmothers and his name to be “Tomjon”. Meanwhile, Magrat has hidden the crown among the actors' props.

7.1 Later that day, the witches watch the players leave Lancre through a crystal ball. Magrat brings up the topic of the traditional behaviour of “fairy godmothers”, i.e., giving the child three magical gifts. After some negotiation, Granny agrees, but they find that they cannot compromise on three gifts, so they decide to give them individually, each witch one gift. Magrat, thinking of her own difficulties in that aspect, wishes for him to be able to make friends easily. Nanny, upon being unable to think of the last stanza of one of her favourite songs, gives him the gift of a remarkable memory for words. Granny, finally, thinking about the theatre and the play she had witnessed earlier, wishes for him to always be whoever he would want to be.

7.2 Early the next morning, a group of soldiers, sent by Duke Felmet to arrest a witch for interrogation, carefully sneak up to Granny Weatherwax's cottage in the middle of Lancre forest. The eerie atmosphere worries the soldiers, even more so when they are startlingly welcomed by the old witch.

7.3 Some hours later, the sergeant reports their meeting with Granny to the duke. What he hears is not at all what he anticipated, having read several works on the topic that depict witches in much the stereotypical way that they are represented, for example, in Shakespeare's Macbeth. As a result, the duke becomes seriously curious about the witches and their doings, and he turns to the Fool to question him next.

7.4 That night, the Fool, before falling asleep, contemplates the new “honour” Felmet has granted him by allowing him to sleep in front of his bedroom’s threshold. Inside the room, the Felmets talk about the witches once more. The duke
summarizes his recent findings, and they discuss their further plans.

7.5 At the next full moon, the three witches meet again, this time in Nanny Ogg's home. In a parody of Felmet's interest in them, they discuss the new duke and his actions since he took over the kingdom, such as burning houses without allowing the inhabitants to leave first. This leads them to indulge in reminiscences of the old king Verence, especially his habit of very regularly exercising his “droit de seigneur”. The naïve Magrat thinks it might be some sort of dog that needed a lot of taking out. The term is really a reference to ‘droit du seigneur’, the feudal right of lords to spend a night, often her wedding night, with a newly wed bride from among their subjects. Magrat surprises them by relating Felmet's public prohibition of mentioning his part in the murder. If anything like this is merely indicated, the person faces severe punishment. In the witches' opinion, his behaviour is foolish, since everybody in Lancre not only knows the truth, but regards regicide as a natural cause of death for kings. Another point of concern for the women is Felmet's lack of respect for witches, which shows, among other things, in him having sent a tax collector to their addresses, something unheard of so far.

7.6 Felmet interrogates the said tax collector about his visits to the witches and is once more disappointed in the results. He ponders on how he hates the kingdom for making him feel uncomfortable, without him being able to put a name to the “how” and “why”. He continues thinking about his current activities and how they do not seem to affect the inhabitants of Lancre as they should – the people are taking whatever he throws at them rather stoically, something Felmet can neither understand nor cope with.

7.7 The new year comes and the reader is given a short glimpse of the boy Tomjon, who is enjoying his life among the players. In this paragraph, the later important dwarf-playwright Hwel is introduced.

7.8 Winter comes to Lancre and it is full of portents, which, for the people living in the Ramtop Mountains, is perfectly normal. When these omens and portents stop all of a sudden during Hogswatchnight, it is extremely alarming. Among the witches, Granny Weatherwax is the first to notice the change. To find out what is

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136 Dwarf, in the Discworld novels, does not refer to a dwarf-sized human, but to an individual race which inhabits the Discworld alongside humans, trolls, and other species.

137 Terry Pratchett’s Discworld equivalent to Christmas and New Years.
happening, she sends out her mind and finds a huge entity feeling very lost and forlorn, which could soon turn into anger.

7.9 At the same time, an earthquake is shaking Lancre castle, waking up the castle dwellers, most prominently the Fool and the duke. Hearing a scream, the Fool stumbles into Felmet’s bedroom. In a streak of panic paired with paranoia, the duke blames the earthquake on the witches, thinking their motive is to harm him, and that they secretly run the country. The Fool tries to reason with him, but fails. In his craze, Felmet shouts at the swaying forest, claiming to be the new king. The shaking stops, but now the sea of trees seems to watch him and to listen. The Fool is now entirely convinced of his lord’s madness but, much to his regret, he is bound to him by oath and loyalty. He tries to comfort the now weeping man by handing him a handkerchief, which leads the duke to the question “is this a dagger” (Weird Sisters: 84). Felmet is on the edge of admitting every detail of the murder to the jester, but is interrupted by the entering duchess. On her appearance, Felmet's madness seems to recede and he composes himself. Both suspect the witches’ doings without listening to the Fool’s interjections. When considering how to best fight magic, the Fool tells them to use words. To the jester's dismay, the couple actually listens this time, giving him no other choice but to proceed by explaining to them the power of words. Upon hearing this, Felmet decides to “tell the world the truth about the witches” (Weird Sisters: 87).

7.10 At the same time, violating a tradition that witches have to stay at home during Hogswatchnight, Granny Weatherwax is hurrying towards the heath, in the direction of Lancre town. Still aware of the strange presence she felt earlier, but unable to figure out what it is, she meets Magrat, who had a fairly similar experience herself. Together, they continue on their way to Nanny’s cottage.

7.11 At Nanny's house, they find a huge celebration going on. They push inside, finding Nanny right in the middle of the hubbub, greatly enjoying herself. At first, they try to be subtle, only indicating the need of a private conversation, but Nanny does not understand their hints. Only when magic is mentioned does she react and lead the others to her old, mostly unused washhouse. Granny and Magrat try to describe what they experienced, using the image of a big dog being lost and getting angry. Since they still do not know what it really is, Gytha suggests conjuring up a demon in her washing copper and questioning it. Neither Granny nor Magrat feel particularly comfortable with the idea, although for different
reasons.

7.12 Their invocation turns out to be rather unconventional, but nevertheless successful. The head of a demon appears and, after having been thoroughly threatened by the witches, agrees to grant them three questions. At first, Granny is very careful at how she phrases her questions, since demons are known to give perfectly accurate, but entirely misleading answers. Having reached the third question, she decides to play according to her own rules. Threatened with being boiled in the copper, the demon tells them that what they felt is the land itself that has awoken and is very unhappy about the new king, whose antipathy it feels. After this answer, the demon is properly banished.

7.13 On her way home, Granny ponders on what she has learned and tries to puzzle out how a land could have a mind. She finally concludes that it could be possible if it was a “mind made up of all the other little minds inside it” (Wyrd Sisters: 100). While still contemplating her new idea, she notices unfamiliar thoughts in her head – something is thinking through her. Looking out of the window, she finds a congregation of forest dwelling animals waiting on her snow covered lawn, and she steps outside to meet them. While talking to them, she tries to explain that no matter what they were expecting her to do. She cannot meddle in politics due to a “fundamental” law of magic, forbidding magic to rule.

7.14 The theatre troupe is travelling again. Mrs. Vitoller is worried because Tomjon has still not learned to speak and Hwel voices his suspicion of some misdoings on the witches’ side. All of a sudden the boy begins to recite a speech from one of Hwel's plays. The whole company assembles to listen, remarking on how much Tomjon sounds like the individual players whom he is imitating. Finally, Mr. Vitoller sends everybody back to their tasks and quietly asks the dwarf's opinion on the matter. In the end, however, the Vitollers decide that the “why” is of no real importance.

7.15 Spring comes to Lancre, and the ghost of Verence is still confined to the castle. On his tours through the castle corridors, he tries to avoid the other ghosts. Unfortunately, so far they have been the only ones able to see him. This changes when he meets the tomcat Greebo in one of the numerous hallways. Remembering Death's explanations that cats are able to perceive ghosts, he manages to attract Greebo's attention. From Greebo's malicious outer appearance, he concludes that only a witch would keep a pet like this and hopes that, by locking it into a room, he
might be able to lure a witch to come to the castle. He manages to carry out his plan and is now left with nothing to do but wait.

7.16 Lying in a meadow outside the castle, the Fool is contemplating his past life, which has not been very happy. He is surprised when he hears somebody singing. Looking up, he discovers Magrat who, following one of her romantic notions, is dancing across the meadow, describing, in a kind of singing way, several medical herbs she is picking. Falling in love immediately, he gets up, startling Magrat. Becoming aware of the occult jewellery she is wearing, he realizes that he has surprised a witch, something which is considered a risk at the best of times in Lancre, and he rushes off in a panic, leaving a stunned Magrat behind.

7.17 This night, the three witches meet again. Nanny is concerned about her tomcat Greebo, who has been missing for some time now, while Granny is eager to report her experience with the forest animals. Magrat is absentminded, which leads to a couple of remarks and complaints from her older colleagues. At some point, Granny begins to tell them about the peculiar visit but is interrupted by Nanny, who reports that she, too, has been frequented, although not by animals, but the burghers of Lancre. They complained about their maltreatment by Felmet and asked her, on behalf of all witches, to do something about him. After she has finished talking, Granny once more points out that the kingdom is worried and, finally, relates her own story. The two women continue to discuss how a country could have a mind and feelings and, more importantly, how it could be able to express them. Magrat throws in her thoughts of the kingdom being like a dog wishing for a caring master, which is agreed to by the others. When the question arises of what they should do, the answer is once more “nothing”. Nanny voices her belief that Tomjon, as the rightful heir to the throne and the crown, will one day be brought back to Lancre by destiny. Magrat interrupts the older witches' conversation by asking whether they have some knowledge of the castle's Fool. They both give her some information in addition to their own comments and opinions, mocking him and the young woman a little. Upset, Magrat stalks back home, after calling them silly old women. The older witches’ own built-up frustration erupts in a serious argument between the two and each walks off alone.

7.18 Back in her cottage, Magrat looks up love spells in her former teacher's diaries. To find out the Fool's real name, she decides to use the so-called “peel-the-apple trick” (Wyrd Sisters: 125). She succeeds, although the reader is not yet given the
name. Next, she memorizes the ingredients for a powerful love potion and sets out into the forest to gather them in the rain.

7.19 Nanny has risen early as well, to search for the still-missing Greebo. Using a little magic, she traces his tracks to the castle. In one of the corridors, she meets Duke Felmet, who is coming out of his bedroom. His reaction is a mixture of paranoia and panic as he believes that she has come to harm him.

8 Meanwhile, a wet and frustrated Magrat is trudging through the thicket, her quest for ingredients having miserably failed. Taking a break, she contemplates her disappointment with the coven and the behaviour of the other witches. Forming a coven had originally been her idea but, unfortunately, it turned out to be the complete opposite of what she had hoped for and dreamed of. Just as she decides to return home, she hears somebody running through the forest and, a short time after, stops Shawn Ogg, the youngest son of Nanny Ogg and guard at Lancre Castle. Breathlessly, he tells her that Felmet has had his mother arrested and accused her of having planned to poison him. Magrat keeps him from calling together his numerous strong brothers to break Nanny free, as she is rightly worried that they could not prevail against the duke's archers. While she is still wondering how to solve the problem, Shawn naively suggests asking Granny Weatherwax for help since “she's a witch” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 130). This remark is the straw to break the camel's back, and Magrat furiously orders him to tell Granny that she herself will handle the affair.

9 In the dungeon beneath the castle, Nanny is held in the stocks, while the duke and the duchess threaten her with torture and being burnt at the stake, which does not seem to impress her much. Duke Felmet, during one of his mad moments, babbles about bad rumours being spread about him and voices whispering to him. Lady Felmet criticises him and they leave the cell for a while to give Nanny time to consider her fate. Once they are gone, Nanny addresses the ghost of the late King Verence, who has been present all the time. She inquires about her cat Greebo and relaxes when she is told that it is well. Feeling responsible for her current situation, as he had lured her into the castle by locking up Greebo, Verence apologizes. Finally, as it is apparent that the ghost cannot help her, the old witch tells him to hold his tongue, silently hoping that the others will soon come and free her.
10 Against Magrat’s order, Shawn has told Granny everything about Nanny’s misfortune and also reports that the people have begun to tell bad stories about his mother, accusing her of having done mischief in a way that is very reminiscent of Shakespeare’s witches. Granny is only vaguely concerned about this part of his news, until Shawn continues to relate what people were claiming about her, Esmerelda Weatherwax. Infuriated, Granny slams her door shut. A little time later, she decides to rescue her friend. After carefully dressing up and preparing, she flies over to the castle.

10.1 Back in her cottage, Magrat has finished her own preparations, although with a strikingly different outcome than Granny’s, mostly due to the use of plenty of makeup, occult jewellery and some of her romantic notions. Further armed with a sharp kitchen knife, she, too, sets out towards the castle.

10.2 Granny arrives at the palace and lands her flying broomstick in the middle of a crowd of Lancre people who have gathered in front of the castle’s entrance gate. Muttering about Felmet having gone too far is heard, and one man explicitly blames the witches for the chaos. Granny forces her way up to the guards, who have been ordered to keep everybody – especially witches – from entering the castle, and tries the apple-seller-trick. When it fails, as she had expected from the first, she intimidates the soldiers until they are compelled to allow her to pass.

10.3 Meanwhile, in the dungeon cell, the Felmets are trying again to scare Nanny. This time they brought the Fool with them, who feels rather miserable about his own role in this affair. It was he who had told his rulers about the power of words but he had not expected such an outcome. Proving unhelpful to the duchess’s aims, he is finally sent outside. Turning her attention back to Nanny, she orders the older woman simply to confess. When asked what to, the couple lists crimes such as treason, malicious witchcraft, helping Felmet’s enemies, the theft of the crown (Wyrd Sisters: 142), and spreading false tales about the death of King Verence. The ghost prompts Nanny with details about the murderous night in question, which she relates to the Felmets. While the duke reacts with a surge of panic, the duchess stays composed and continues to threaten the witch. Verence is so filled with hate and furious energy that he is almost becoming visible and he strains to pick up a blood stained dagger. Nanny, seeing a chance to distract her torturers, magically sends a bit of her own strength into the ghost, just as the duchess is about to commence her evil doings.
The focus of the story turns back to the castle gates, where Magrat is trying the same apple-seller-trick that Granny used, much to the remaining guard's surprise. Still being ordered to not let any witches – into which category of people Magrat with all her suspicious looking makeup and jewellery doubtless belongs – past, he finds himself in a moral dilemma, since witches are recently supposed to be bad company. He solves the problem by deciding that, since she claims to be an apple-seller, he will not argue with her. He allows her to enter, also informing her that another sales woman has passed him only a few minutes ago.

Much to her dismay, Granny Weatherwax has gotten lost in the castle's numerous corridors and is wandering around trying to find the dungeon.

About the same time, Magrat has found her way to the stairwell leading down to the dungeons, where she meets two guards. They take her down, threatening her with sexually harassing acts which she does not notice at first. When she does get worried, she tries to escape them by telling them that, actually, she is a witch, hoping the fact would scare them away. The effect is quite contrary to her intentions. The men's behaviour becomes even rougher, and when a scream is heard from one of the corridors, they tell her that she has just heard “a witch having it the hard way”, a fate she could avoid herself by being 'nice' to them (Wyrd Sisters: 146). They are interrupted by the Fool who, enraged by the maltreatment of Magrat, orders them to let her go. When only laughed at by the stronger men, he attacks, and together Magrat and the Fool manage to overcome the soldiers. He then leads Magrat to the cell, pointing out an irregularity about it: it is locked from the inside. He then tries to begin a conversation and to complement her, which is mostly ignored as Magrat is concentrating on finding a way to unlock the door. Finally, she tells him to stand back, calling him “Verence”, much to the Fool's surprise, as he had always assumed that nobody apart from his family knew his real name. Magrat, meanwhile, is considering a spell for which she would normally need a high amount of preparation time and exotic ingredients, but after the earlier invocation of a demon in a simple wash tub, she is willing to try nevertheless. The spell is supposed to remind the door's wood of the time when it was still a living, growing tree and thus bring the old wood back to life. To achieve this, the young woman pushes a high quantity of magical energy into the door, though at first with no apparent effect, a fact Granny remarks on when she steps out of the shadows from which she has been watching Magrat's
efforts. She is proven wrong when a noise makes them aware of the wooden planks starting to change. They have to flee when the wood bursts suddenly and violently into life, thereby destroying the stone walls around the door. The witches turn back when reminded of their mission by the Fool. In the partly ruined cell, they find the Felments cowering against the far off wall, while Nanny, still sitting in the stock, calmly inquires what took them so long. In addition, a dagger is floating in the air, held by the ghost, who is only visible to the witches. He wants to attack Duke Felmet but quickly loses his strength and has to let go of the dagger. The duchess is the quicker of the two to regain her wits and she calls for the guards. Granny takes a close look at the duke, who at first appears to have totally succumbed to madness. She tries to tell him to leave the kingdom and is surprised when he, having fought back his panic, turns against her and even invokes the earlier mentioned rule of magic not being allowed to rule against the witches. As he explains, they cannot do anything against him, since that would be to break that rule; Granny is forced to grudgingly give in.

10.7 The witches retreat with the Fool following them, managing to convince Magrat to agree to a rendezvous. On the way out, Nanny picks up a stone for no obvious reason, but the ghost of Verence is relieved she does. Meanwhile, an even larger crowd than earlier has gathered in the castle's courtyard, with the people being on the brink of revolting. While the witches observe the mass of people, the duke appears behind the women and orders them to wave and smile to calm down the people, threatening to give his archers the signal for shooting if the witches would not obey. He then addresses the crowd himself, claiming to be the people's friend who would protect them from the witches, who, according to him, have agreed to leave them alone from now on. After a last forced wave and the short command to the people to return to their homes, the humiliated witches finally make their way out of the palace. They only stop when they reach the forest edge, where Granny, claiming the need to think, absents herself from the other two. The concerned Magrat asks Nanny about her wellbeing and the older witch actually complains about the Felments' attitude towards torture; in her opinion, they ought to have done less talking and more real torturing. She then changes the subject by commenting on the younger's new suitor. Magrat tries to downplay their mutual interest in each other, in the attempt mentioning his small stature and his capering. Having taken a more critical look at the man herself, Nanny advises the other to
examine him more properly the next time they meet, voicing her opinion that the
Fool was really a rather intelligent man.
Granny surfaces from her pondering silence, and all three briefly discuss Magrat's
suggestion of asking other witches for help, but discard the idea soon. Instead, they
concede to simply go home. On the way, Nanny explains to Magrat the difficulties
of handling magic properly, stating that “the hardest magic is the sort you don't use
at all” (Wyrd Sisters: 164), meaning that the discipline of restraint is the hardest
one. Suddenly remembering something, she then takes the castle stone out of her
pocket and King Verence's ghost appears before them. After having introduced
himself, he tells them how he, clinging to the piece of rock Nanny took with her,
managed to circumvent the bindings of a ghost to his death place. He continues by
beseeching the witches to put his son on the throne. When their reaction is one of
reluctance, he inquires instead about Tomjon's wellbeing and whereabouts. Being
deeply worried for the kingdom, he entreats them once more for help and vanishes.
The easily touched Magrat opts for becoming active as he wished, but Granny,
although unhappily, intends to follow the rules. While they are talking, a horse-
drawn cart is racing down the road, towards them, but Granny, believing that the
driver would not dare to run down a witch, ignores the approaching danger. Her
conviction is proven wrong, a sign of how Felmet's anti-witch propaganda
campaign is affecting people's behaviour towards witches, and she is only saved by
Magrat pushing her off the road. Granny is overcome with frustration and rage, and
has to be brought back to the ground by Nanny. The outcome of the incident is
Granny's decision to ignore all rules and go against Felmet, a decision followed by
her colleagues.

Felmet is jubilant since his strategy of defaming the witches is beginning to
show first effects, while the Fool, who happens to be in the same room, dreams of
his reunion with Magrat. The duchess, not usually prone to thinking, is reflecting
on what the Fool has taught them about the power of words. Despite the apparent
truth of his teachings, she is not fully convinced. In her opinion, the strong rule the
world by sheer will and strength, while weaklings, which she considers to be
everybody but herself, need instruments to help them on their way. She does,
however, acknowledge the potential of powerful words and orders the Fool to tell
her more. He explains that the right words could even change past events, i.e.,
history, in people's minds. Upon hearing this, Duke Felmet decides to rewrite
history, that is, how he became the new king of Lancre, and the Fool is ordered to find somebody to write a play that should tell the Felmets' version of events to the entire world.

10.9 The witches meet again that night. Being determined to do everything right, Granny calls upon Magrat as the coven expert to tell them how to proceed. However, after having heard about praising the full moon in songs, she cannot bring herself to do any of it.

10.10 The Fool has been asked to free Greebo and, following Magrat's warnings about the vicious tomcat, is extremely careful about it. Thanks to borrowed armour, he withstands Greebo's immediate attack and carries the animal out of the castle.

10.11 At their meeting, the witches discuss whether or not cursing Felmet would change anything, but dismiss the idea as useless. When Verence's ghost is mentioned, Nanny complains about her cottage being crowded with all the ghosts from Lancre Castle who, like Verence, have clung to the piece of rock she had brought from there. In the time before their meeting, Granny has thought of a plan to rid themselves of Felmet without having to interfere too much: she simply wants to exchange him for Tomjon. To make her idea more intelligible for her friends, she refers to an infamous bad witch, “Black” Aliss Demurrage who, a long time ago, had moved a castle a hundred years through time. Granny intends to take this a step further. Instead of moving just the castle, she wants to move the whole kingdom of Lancre fifteen years into the future. Nanny is particularly sceptical since this spell would involve circumflying the whole kingdom within one night and to complete the spell before sunrise. Since all witches’ magical powers are limited, such an endeavour would be extremely difficult. Granny has thought of all eventualities, though, and describes the rest of her idea to the others. The reader is, for the time being, left in the dark about the details. After some immediate shock, all witches hurry to fulfil their individual tasks.

10.12 About the same time, the Fool is facing a considerable problem. Instead of delivering Greebo to Nanny Ogg's house in the town, he had decided to bring him to Magrat for boasting, hoping to be invited in. Unfortunately, he got lost in the forest and Greebo has run off. All alone, he tries to find his way back to the town.

10.13 In the sky above Lancre, Magrat is floating on her broomstick, waiting for Granny to meet her. Noticing that the older witch is late, she begins to reflect on
Granny's relationship to broomsticks and flying in general. Granny finally arrives, and Magrat hands over hot cocoa and sandwiches before transferring most of her magic to Granny who then flies away. All by herself, Magrat is left with a problem: without her magic, the broomstick will simply fall down to the earth, together with the witch riding it. Against all probabilities, she not only survives the fall but even lands on something soft in a forest full of trees, undergrowth and stones.

10.14 Unaware of Magrat's fight with gravity, Granny continues her flight along the borders of Lancre, steering towards her meeting point with Nanny Ogg.

10.15 In the forest, Magrat discovers that she has landed on the Fool. Remembering Nanny's earlier advice, she observes the man closely and, to her surprise, realizes that he is not actually small but makes himself look it by walking in a half-crouch to better fit his role as jester. Together, they try to find their way out of the forest.

10.16 Granny is speeding over the grim Ramtop Mountains further along the borders of Lancre. In the mist above the mountains, she finds Nanny Ogg, but before they are able to perform the same manoeuvre as earlier, i.e., transferring Nanny's powers to Granny, the latter's broomstick all of a sudden falls down.

10.17 Taking a break on a small hill, the Fool and Magrat have started a conversation, telling each other about their individual trainings and careers. Magrat complains a little about the others' behaviour, and the Fool assures her that she is not like them at all. She tells him that she would rather he would not work for the duke, but the Fool explains that he is bound by oath and loyalty, whether he likes it or not. Finally, he asks permission to kiss Magrat, which is granted. They kiss each other and, at this very moment, the spell takes effect and Lancre is moved fifteen years into the future.

10.18 Up in the sky, the two older witches have discovered the reason for the malfunction of Granny's broomstick: in the moist and freezing air above the mountains, the bristles have been covered with ice. Later, they also catch fire. During a spectacular flying manoeuvre, Nanny manages to pull Granny onto her own broomstick. Being relatively safe once more, they begin to worry about yet another difficulty: time is running short, since the spell must be completed before the first cockcrow and the night is almost over. When Granny thinks she hears a muffled crow somewhere below them, Nanny calms her down, knowing exactly that all her numerous children and grandchildren will make sure that no cock
crows early. The witches reach their final destination and complete the spell.

10.19 Lancre speeds up fifteen years into the future without anybody, who is not psychically inclined or undead, noticing.

10.20 A short paragraph looks back to Magrat and the Fool. They vaguely noticed something happening during their technically fifteen-years-long kiss and decide to try again.

10.21 A tremor goes through the kingdom, telling several people to release the throats of thirty-two cocks, who are now free to greet the new morning.

10.22 The older witches have retired to Nanny’s cottage where they discuss the last night’s events and how to find and bring Tomjon back. Granny is sure that he will be in Ankh-Morpork, the Discworld’s biggest city. In her experience, whenever destiny is somehow involved, the person in question will sooner or later show up there.

10.23 Some time later, the Fool and Magrat have an argument, because the duke is sending him to Ankh-Morpork to find a playwright and a theatre company to stage his play. Magrat tries to convince the Fool to resign but fails and they separate in anger.

10.24 In the meantime, the theatre company has settled down in Ankh-Morpork, where they are building their own playhouse, called the “Dysk”. One night, Hwel is trying to compose a play for the opening gala when he hears noises and a thump from Tomjon’s room next door, and storms in. Tomjon, now about eighteen years old, tells him about a strange and frightening dream he just had: in the dream, he had seen the three Lancre witches, staring at him through a crystal ball, him being inside the ball and they outside. Instead of going back to bed, Tomjon decides to go out for a drink. Knowing enough of Ankh-Morpork’s night time streets to be worried, Hwel accompanies him to keep the boy safe.

10.25 They finally reach a pub called the “Mended Drum” (Wyrd Sisters: 216) and approach the bar. Problems begin when one of the other patrons continuously insults the dwarf Hwel. Hwel manages to keep his temper until the man makes a grave mistake in calling an orangutan\footnote{The orangutan in question is the librarian of Ankh-Morpork’s Unseen University, a university for magicians. During a magical accident the librarian was transformed into an orangutan and is actually quite satisfied with his new lifestyle. However, he hates being called a monkey.}, who is having a beer at the bar, a monkey, something to which the ape reacts by knocking the man unconscious. The result is a huge tavern fight. Tomjon decides to stop the battle; he leaves his and
the dwarf’s hiding place and begins to perform a soliloquy about comradeship from one of Hwel’s plays. Thanks to Tomjon’s special acting talents, the men stop fighting, and are so completely absorbed in the words that the brawl is entirely forgotten. Tomjon ends his performance and Hwel pulls him out of the pub before the “spell” wears off. Outside, Hwel tries to persuade the youth to go home, but Tomjon would much rather continue their pub crawl and suggests visiting a dwarf tavern, nothing Hwel is too fond of. When they hear a scream from an alley, they hurry over and find three professional thieves trying to rob a man in a jester’s costume. Tomjon and Hwel manage to resolve the situation to the jester’s – by now recognized by the reader as the Fool from far away Lancre – advantage.

10.26 It is already early morning. Tomjon and Hwel have taken the Fool to their lodgings and tended his bruises. The Fool first admires Tomjon’s persuasive abilities and then invites both of them for a drink to show his gratitude. Unknowingly, he insults the already high-strung Hwel who stops short a scream of frustration when he looks at the two men, seeing something that is not yet revealed to the reader. Finally, he gives in and the three head outside once more.

10.27 They end up in a dwarf tavern and get extremely drunk, and Tomjon performs some improvisations for the cheering patrons. Upon learning that Tomjon and Hwel belong to a theatre company, the Fool suddenly gets very sober and tells them that they are exactly the people he has come to seek in Ankh-Morpork.

10.28 Later the same day, at the building site of the “Dysk”, Hwel evaluates the night’s and the early morning’s events up to the present moment. Vitoller interrupts his thoughts. In the course of a conversation between Vitoller, Hwel and Tomjon, the reader learns that the Fool gave them a large amount of money to write and stage Duke Felmet’s play. Tomjon remarks how uncomfortable the man has seemed to be while telling his story. Vitoller claims that it would be enough money to finish the “Dysk”. Hwel and Tomjon are only convinced when Vitoller admits that, in order to provide both of them with all the technical equipment and the better life they are dreaming of, he took a loan from a credit shark. Hwel agrees to write the play and Tomjon to enact it, taking the company’s apprentices with him to Lancre. Hwel’s imagination is already speedily working when the final details are discussed. Vitoller, upon learning where the play is to be staged, is suddenly reluctant to let Tomjon go, as he fears that his son might find out about his adoption there. Hwel, being in his own sphere of creativity, hears nothing of it
but begins writing.

10.29 That night, while Hwel, in his room, is completely absorbed in the process of composing the new play, Tomjon, in the next room, is dreaming about the witches again. The story now fluctuates between his dream and the actual witches, who are performing a charm meant to pull him back to Lancre. The Fool, at the other side of the city, awakens at the same time as Tomjon. When he falls asleep again, he too dreams of the witches. The focus shifts back to Tomjon who has awoken once more, having recognized the three women from his earlier dreams. He gets up and looks for Hwel, who is sleeping with his head on his writing desk, surrounded by crumpled sheets of paper containing dismissed drafts. Tomjon browses through several of them while Hwel chases after formidable props and technical fancies in his own dreams.

10.30 A few days later, Vitoller and Hwel are discussing the new play. Vitoller likes it, except for the ghost on whom Hwel insists as a “dramatic necessity” (Wyrd Sisters: 245). Vitoller addresses his concerns about having to make do without Hwel and Tomjon, but mainly he is afraid that if Tomjon goes back to Lancre, fate might not allow him to return to Ankh-Morpork. Hwel tries to comfort him by assuring him that they will be gone for the summer only. Vitoller still believes that destiny has a hand in everything, especially since the dwarf has told him that he had observed a similarity in Tomjon’s and the Fool’s appearance. Hwel, in the privacy of his mind, has his own opinion about destiny, concerning both real life and the theatre.

10.31 The focus shifts back to the three witches. In Nanny’s cottage, they are observing Tomjon once more with the help of Nanny’s crystal ball. Magrat and Nanny are confused because Tomjon appears to be travelling in a cart, and they wonder whether or not he is bringing the right equipment for the “rightful heir against evil usurper” fight with Felmet they are expecting. They are also trying to understand why he is accompanied by a group of young men; Granny offers an optimistic theory for every question although she, too, is harbouring slight doubts about the effectiveness of their spell. She calms her conscience by conceding that Tomjon being on the way is the only thing that matters. The older witches agree to watch him throughout his journey to make sure that he arrives whole and healthy in Lancre and is ready for the duel with Felmet, thus overruling Magrat’s objection that a future king should be able to fight his own battles. After Granny has left,
Magrat stays behind in an attempt to debate the matter of “not meddling” with Nanny. The old witch applies her own logic to the cause, pointing out several relevant facts and disturbing developments in Lancre, such as the maltreatment of some of her family members by other Lancre people because of the bad rumours Felmet has been spreading. At the end of the conversation, Magrat asks permission to borrow the crystal ball to take a look at the Fool. She hurries home, and is relieved when she does not meet anybody along the way, partly because of the recent resentments against witches, and partly due to people slowly noticing some effects of the witches’ time travelling spell. Safely back at home, she prepares to watch the Fool.

10.32 The ball shows her that the Fool is taking a nap on the ship he took for returning to Lancre. Magrat is glad that he appears to be well. She still wonders why he would not give up the profession he hates so much. Although she will not even admit it to herself, because of the argument they had before his leave-taking, she misses him.

10.33 The journey of the little theatre troupe turns out to be a very long one. Along the way, they stage plays to earn some money and a place to spend the night. During travelling hours, Hwel ponders those performances and especially considers Tomjon’s acting skills and how he seems to always be completely transformed on stage, no matter which role he plays. Regrettably, the magic of the stage he sees at work during those performances is not inspiring Felmet’s play. Not understanding why this is, Hwel keeps rewriting it time after time.

10.34 Two days later, the group is attacked by robbers. It is not the first time, but Tomjon has always been able to fend off any criminals until now by giving them a speech from one of Hwel’s plays, usually touching them to a degree that, while crying tears, they offer to give their own valuables to the company. This time, however, he fails. The witches are watching everything through the crystal ball and decide to intervene. Mysteriously, a milk jug appears in the air above the chief robber’s head and crashes down, sending him into unconsciousness and causing his companions to flee. The players, among them a stunned Tomjon, continue their journey.

10.35 The witches are wondering why the actors are strolling all around the country instead of going straight to Lancre. Granny Weatherwax decides that it is time to meet their “new king” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 260) in person, ending her statement with a
cackle that incites warnings from Magrat and Nanny, as it is considered a bad sign for the state of a witch’s sanity.

10.36 The company is lost. When Tomjon suggests asking somebody for directions, Hwel, annoyed as there seems to be no living soul anywhere near, sarcastically asks whom the boy is referring to. To his surprise the youth points out an old woman trying to hide behind a bush. The woman in question turns out to be Esmerelda Weatherwax who, after some confusion, explains to them the way to Lancre, declining a traditional invitation to share their lunch. When they get lost again sometime later, they, apparently coincidentally, meet Magrat. She gives them further directions, refusing the same invitation. When they take another wrong turn, they surprisingly find Nanny Ogg. Again they receive directions but this time with a plus. Nanny actually accepts their reluctantly given invitation, helping herself to a lift to Lancre town on their cart.

10.37 Half an hour later, they arrive at the city. Nanny is slightly disappointed when Tomjon seems rather unimpressed by the sights she has been trying to point out to him, hoping to awaken some interest for his birth place. After she disappears, the dwarf decides that before actually performing the play, they would have to meet the duke as he had requested to read the script first.

10.38 Nanny has hurried to Granny’s hut where she reports to her friend about the theatre company’s plan to perform a play. Granny reasons that it might just be a ploy to get into the castle unsuspected. In the same manner, she retorts all of Nanny’s doubtful arguments. One of Nanny’s concerns is her observation of Tomjon not being impressed with the kingdom at all, but Granny suspects that he was probably simply too overcome with emotions to speak. She makes sure that some of Nanny’s relatives are still working in the castle and thus able to act as spies for the witches. She also wants to inform Magrat, as they all should attend this ominous performance.

10.39 In the castle, the duke and the duchess have received and read the script. They love the play and claim that it is exactly how the past “will have been” (Wyrd Sisters: 270). Hwel, being very irritated by the manner of the couple, secretly only wants to be done with his business in Lancre so he can get away from them.

10.40 Once the Fool has returned to Lancre, Magrat meets him and interrogates him about the play. He explains that it is Felmet’s attempt to convince himself and the people of Lancre of his version of the murder. He claims to have been forbidden to
talk about it but hints at the time and place of the performance, i.e., the next night at the castle, as well as at who is invited and how they can get into the castle unobserved. He also remarks that the duke expects them. Magrat storms off to inform the other witches, leaving behind a disappointed Fool.

10.41 The next night, the witches adjourn to the castle to see the play. They are worried, on the one hand, about what Felmet might have in store for them and, on the other hand, wonder what Tomjon might have planned to win back the throne. The Fool is waiting for Magrat at the door and drags her to a room he has prepared for themselves in one of the towers, as he says, to watch the performance in private.

10.42 Granny and Nanny have found seats for themselves among the audience and, in addition, keep one seat empty for the ghost of King Verence. The play begins and Granny finds herself once more on unfamiliar ground – the magic of the theatre still makes her feel uncomfortable, partly because, unlike most people, she is not interested in imagining another world.

10.43 Hwel is watching the first actors from the wings, then hurries backstage to get all the others into their positions, especially the three young men impersonating the three “bad witches”. In his opinion, things are already going very wrong; among other problems, most of the actors are extremely nervous and forgetting their lines on stage. To get his “witches” into the right mood, he gives them a fiery motivation speech before sending them on stage, silently cursing the restrictions of theatre props and wishing for real thunder. The next problem arises when Tomjon, who is playing the “bad king,” announces that he is unable to find a crown. Irritated, Hwel sends him back to the boxes to look more closely. The next moment he is hurrying back to the wings to prompt some forgetful actors. Tomjon finally finds something crown-like at the bottom of a box.

10.44 In the audience, Granny, to her horror, has understood that the “witches” on stage are meant to represent herself and her colleagues in the worst way possible. All three witches are outraged and shocked. Up in the tower, the Fool tries to flirt with Magrat by reciting a love poem written for him by Hwel, but Magrat storms off to find the other witches.

10.45 The late King Verence is just as scandalized as the witches are, although for different reasons. Tomjon, in his role as the “bad king”, has entered the stage, actually wearing the crown of Lancre which Magrat had hidden fifteen years ago.
For his role, Tomjon is playing a limping, tyrannical hunchback, but Verence at first believes the disfigurements to be real. Nanny explains to him that this “bad king” is supposedly meant to represent him, which bewilders the ghost even more. Bad enough that his son, fifteen years older than he was the last time Verence had seen him, is disfigured, he also makes his late father look like a humanoid monster. Meanwhile, Granny is studying the audience. She realizes that, no matter what the people used to know as the truth, from the end of the play onwards, they will believe what they have just watched happening on stage, and the fictional history of the play will become the real past, at least in people’s minds. Sarcastically she thinks that the theatre is really “Art holding a Mirror up to Life” (*Wyrd Sisters*: 283) – it gets everything wrong. Granny, upon facing the inevitable changes that are already beginning to take place, is on the edge of giving up. Next to her, Nanny, in her rage, is readying herself to interrupt the show, but Granny pulls her back just as the end of the first act is announced. Felmet, from what Granny is able to make out of him, is highly pleased with the course of events. The old witch becomes aware of the land again, feeling it waiting. She tells her friend to come with her, and they leave the audience section.

11 Duke Felmet is so euphoric that he believes he can actually feel the past changing. Following an impulse, he commands his guards to go and arrest the witches. The duchess, well remembering what happened the last time they imprisoned a witch, is not please. The duke, however, is convinced that there will be no problems if all three are arrested at once. He feels safe because public opinion is turning against the witches more and more, thanks to his defamation campaigns which, he is sure, will weaken them further. Being unable to find a weak spot in his argument, his wife reluctantly agrees.

11.1 In the backstage area, the actor personifying Death is practising his lines in front of a mirror, receiving a few words of advice from Tomjon. Tomjon is worried as he cannot escape the feeling that the play is trying to rewrite itself. To distract himself, he begins to wander around the castle during intermission. Out on the battlements, he experiences an eerie and cold sensation, with voices just outside his hearing-range trying to speak to him. It is really Verence’s ghost trying to communicate with his son, but he stays invisible and inaudible for the youth. Frightened, Tomjon flees back to the stage.
Following Felmet’s order, the guards have arrested three witches. The problem is that, instead of the real witches, they got the three dressed-up actors playing “witches.” Ignoring their pleas and, defying any explanation, he has them thrown into a dungeon.

The real witches have retired backstage, reading and discussing a copy of the script that Granny has found. All of them are more than unsettled by the play and the changes they have experienced – even the usually very patient and soft-hearted Magrat finds a couple of hard words, much to the surprise of her colleagues. After some back and forth of ideas, the young witch suggests that they should change the words of the play. Granny is not convinced at first but agrees only a little later when Nanny supports Magrat. Their plan is not to give the actors new words, but make them forget the old ones so that the truth will tell itself. They are interrupted when Hwel stomps towards them, mistaking them for his three missing actors, shooing them onto the stage where they are to sit around a cauldron in the background, symbolizing occult powers. Granny finds this new development most useful, and the real witches take their positions on the stage, becoming a part of the play.

Hwel is watching the progress of the performance from the wings, giving the signal for the artificial thunder which, thanks to a ruined prop, is not convincing. Letting go of his nerves for a moment, he shouts at the sky and is answered by thunder loud enough to make the whole castle shake. The performance continues clumsily while, in the background, Nanny and Magrat comment on the cauldron, its contents and the fake fire below it, loud enough for all the audience to hear. They irritate the already nervous actors to such an extent that the “good duke”, who is supposed to have the final duel scene against the “bad king” Tomjon, forgets his role completely. In his seat, Felmet is having a panic attack when he recognizes the women on stage, while the duchess calmly gives an order to the next guard. On the stage, Tomjon has been left alone with the script, trying to fight his way through a scene in which at least three other players should be performing instead of focusing on the witches. When he, too, finally turns to the witches, his miraculous memory fails him for the first time in his young life. Granny sees her moment and walks forward to the edge of the stage, speaking a few lines in what she hopes to be a lyrical, theatrical way. Her spell deletes all written words from the actors’ minds and makes space for the truth to fill the blank space – the play is finally able to recreate itself, and, instead of Felmet’s twisted propaganda version, the actors, forced by the power of truth and the special magic of the play, begin to
exactly re-enact the events of Verence’s murder.

13.2 Backstage, “Death” is waiting for his cue, going through his lines once more. When he loses the thread, a hollow voice prompts for him. On turning around, expecting Tomjon, the young man freezes in shock when his gaze falls upon the real Death who makes the memory vanish from the man’s mind immediately. As the witches did earlier, Death now takes over the actor’s place, making himself a part of the play. For a while, he considers the thing called ‘theatre’ which, like many human concepts, fascinates him. Reminding himself of the reason he has come tonight, he straightens up and waits silently for his cue, secretly looking forward to his performance.

13.3 The cue comes and Death enters the stage. What he had not taken into account, though, is that, since all the people gathered this night are expecting to see him, the normally invisible Death is, for once, very perceptible for the humans, which makes him hesitate for the first time. Tomjon, although hardly able to say anything other than what the play wants him to, still tries to help and prompt his supposed colleague who painstakingly makes it through his lines. Just when the killing itself is about to be re-enacted, Felmet has a nervous breakdown. Screaming “No!” (Wyrd Sisters: 299), he climbs onto the stage, shouting that these were all lies, babbling and giving away exactly those details he had been trying so hard to keep secret. The ghost of Verence takes possession of Tomjon’s body, shouting accusations at Felmet. The duchess steps in, dismissing the ghost and Death as unreliable witnesses and orders the soldiers to simply arrest everybody. To everyone’s surprise the Fool intervenes – he has finally found the courage to step forward and admit that he had seen all that had happened during that dreadful night. In a fit, Felmet grabs a dagger from one of the confused actors and stabs the Fool. Upon dying the Fool feels free for the first time in his life and throws away his hated jester’s hat. Moments later he is startled by the fact that he is not feeling any pain although he should be lethally wounded. Death is puzzled as well. The duke, by now, has reached a point far beyond mere madness, which liberates him, too, in a way. He stabs at some of the actors and, when there is no blood on the blade, he is fully convinced that he never actually did anything wrong. Blaming his wife he stabs her too, and then himself. In a kind of trance, he turns to Death, asking if there would be a falling star to signal a noble’s death and, believing himself out of the reach of any living human’s justice, he wanders away,
accompanying the audience’s applause. Death, in the meantime, is still highly confused by the recent events, i.e., people apparently dying without him having known about it before. When Granny examines the dagger more closely, she discovers that it is fake, the blade slipping into the handle upon pressure, causing the illusion of sinking into the victim’s flesh. The duchess has not yet given up, but her tirade is stopped short by Granny who, on a cue from the ghost, declares Tomjon in front of everybody to be the rightful heir of the Lancre throne. Unimpressed, the duchess again orders the guards to arrest the old witch. At this moment, her and the duke’s plan to cause fear of the witches in the people backfires. Taking what they have just heard and seen about witches for real, the soldiers refuse to take any action against them. Losing her always short patience, the duchess takes away one of their spears and thrusts it at Granny, who is able to fend off the attack. Believing in her own strength, the duchess taunts Granny, telling her to do her worst against her. Instead of curses and demons, Granny uses her skills at ‘headology’ on the woman, entering her mind and showing her all the terrible things about herself she has hidden from herself behind a mental wall. Momentarily, the duchess is frozen in terror, but the effect does not hold for long. Being perfectly satisfied with her cruel and violent nature, she shakes off the paralysis and shouts at everybody, telling them how weak they all are compared to her, until Nanny sets an end to the drama by hitting her on the head with the cauldron, thus sending her into unconsciousness. Granny turns to Tomjon, emphasising once more that he is the new king of Lancre. Tomjon, terrified, tries to escape by claiming he has no idea of how to be a king, but Granny tells him to do what he is best at: to act. Not even Hwel can help the boy now since he is busily rewriting the play, completely oblivious to everything happening around him.

13.4 Death follows Duke Felmet through the castle, trying to convince him that he is still alive. Felmet, however, has made up his crazed mind. He believes himself to be a ghost and is determined to act this part as stereotypically as possible, dreaming aloud of chains and sheets and screaming at people in dark hallways. At some point during his wanderings, he jumps onto a small wall on the battlements. He loses his balance and falls down into the gorge beneath the castle where Death claims his soul for real.

13.5 Later that night, the castle’s great hall is filled with people to whom the witches explain their time moving spell and tell the story of how they saved
Tomjon as a toddler by giving him to the Vitollers as an adoptive child, a tale that is confirmed by Hwel. While everybody is discussing his rightful claim to the throne, Tomjon does not feel like claiming anything. All he wants to be is an actor in his “father’s” company. He fervently tries to find a solution when Hwel mentions that the only way out for him would be a brother or other male relative. At the same time, Magrat begins a heated discussion with Nanny Ogg, the subjects of which appear to be the Fool and Tomjon, who are again and again closely examined by the women. After a while, Granny Weatherwax joins the conversation. Finally, Magrat drags the Fool over to the throne and Tomjon.

13.6 The witches meet again one month later. Everybody is keeping rather quiet. When they start to talk, the conversation’s topic is the coronation banquet that seems to have taken place earlier that night or the night before. The older witches remark on having missed Magrat at the festivities, and she explains that her absence had been due to her not having received an invitation. The older women dismiss this notion, telling her that nobody was invited, everybody just went there. Both Granny and Nanny are quite satisfied with the new king, Verence II of Lancre, formerly known as the Fool. The reason for this is explained to the reader a few pages later. This fact makes Magrat’s absence even more remarkable because of their relationship. When she is still miserable, the other two try to comfort her by assuring her that no matter how busy he might be at the moment, he will have time to see her again eventually.

13.7 The focus shifts to the junior theatre company who are on their way back to Ankh-Morpork. After a performance, Hwel and Tomjon are having a conversation about how much money they have been given by the Fool and how to save it until they reach the city. The discussion leads to Hwel’s observation of how much Tomjon resembles his father Olwyn Vitoller. It is mentioned that Hwel is working on a new play about the king of Lancre.

13.8 While Magrat is still at the Sabbath, something is happening at her cottage. The newly crowned king has arrived, armed with a bouquet of flowers, a bottle of champagne, and, to his regret, the obligatory guard. After having found a way to send the man off, he reflects on how hard he will have to work on being a good king, happy that at least he will not have to be a jester anymore. He is somewhat worried about the duchess, however. After having tried kindness, which failed miserably, he is afraid that, ultimately, he might have to have her beheaded. He
enters Magrat’s house and falls asleep on a kitchen chair while waiting for her return.

13.9 Said duchess is fleeing from Lancre Castle the same night. In her mind, she is chiding all other humans for their weakness again because they had pity with a widow. She still thinks of herself as the strongest of all, and of everybody else as being scared of her. She is already making plans for returning to power somehow, somewhere, but not through a husband anymore as she believes him to have been the weakest of all. She succeeds in leaving the castle and runs on through the forest. Around her, strange things begin to take place: the trees seem to close in around her without moving, the path she is following disappears behind her, and there is a noise all around without any wind. Suddenly, she reaches a clearing that will vanish again later. Crowded in this space are numerous members of the more dangerous forest dwelling species. As one they surround the woman and attack, all in complete silence. Her death is the last weight taken off the relieved kingdom.

14 At their meeting place, the witches have finished the last of the champagne Nanny has brought from the banquet and reflect on how Verence II became the new king of Lancre instead of Tomjon. Magrat thanks the others for having supported her when she made everybody aware of how alike the two men looked. She also explains that she had looked up the expression “droit de seigneur,” which was used at the beginning of the novel in reference to the old king. She becomes suspicious of something being odd when the other women show signs of being uncomfortable. Finally they decide to tell her the whole truth. Since the old king used to be out hunting so often, his wife was alone most of the time and, at some point, began a sexual relationship with the Fool’s father, the court jester at the time. It turns out that the old jester really is Verence II’s father and that of Tomjon as well. Officially, however, the witches let everybody believe that, because of Verence I’s joy in exercising his “droit de seigneur,” he impregnated the Fool’s mother, which would make him the biologic father of both the Fool and Tomjon, thus enabling him to claim the throne as Tomjon’s half-brother. Magrat is shocked at first but has to, although somewhat reluctantly, admit that letting people believe this version is for the better. When the sun begins to rise, the witches say their goodbyes without arranging a new meeting, and each goes home to her individual cottage.

The End
Erklärung


Graz am: ____________________________

Unterschrift: ____________________________